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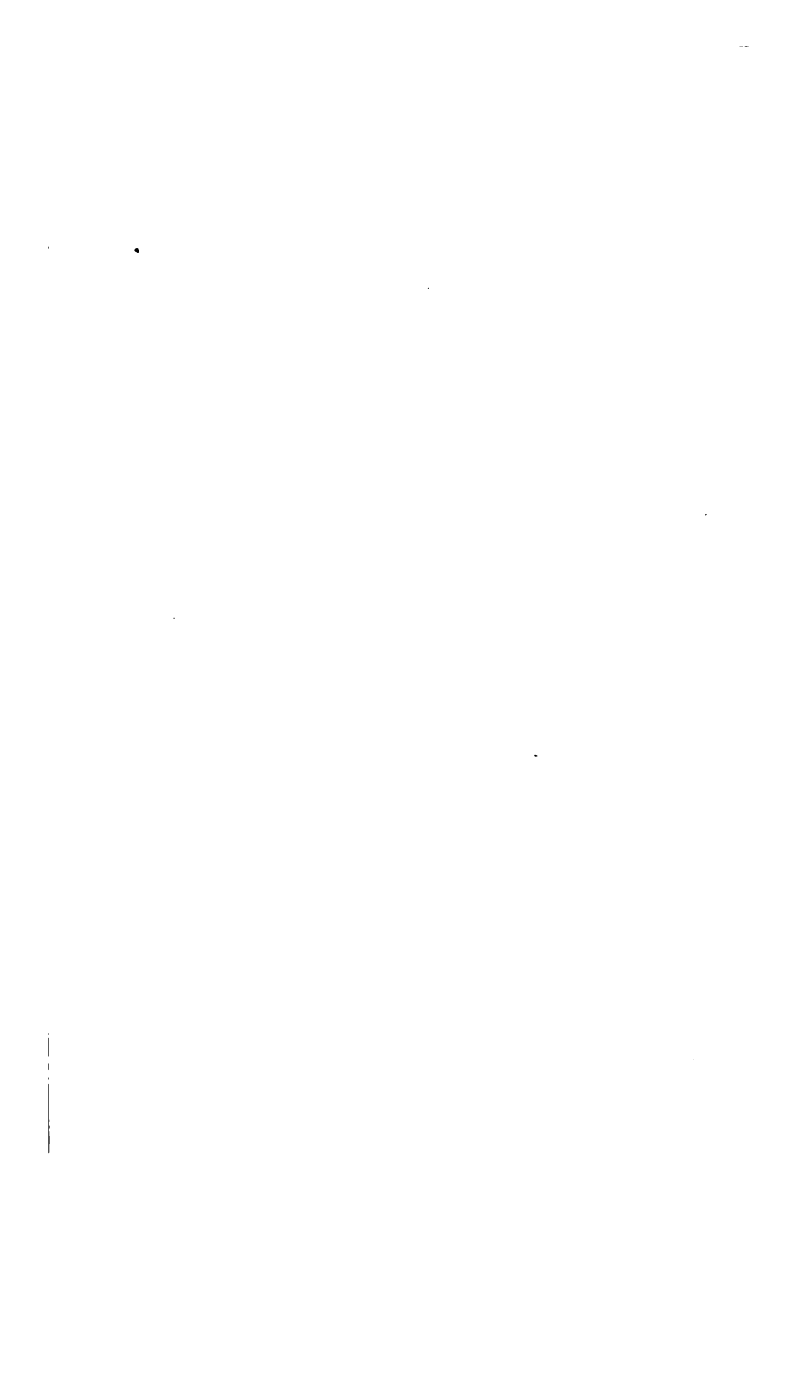




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THE
FEUDS
OF
LUNA & PEROLLO ;

OR, THE
FORTUNES
OF THE
HOUSE OF PANDOLFINA.

AN HISTORIC ROMANCE, OF THE SIXTEENTH
CENTURY

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

Who set this ancient quarrel new abreach?
Speak, nephew, were you by when it began?

SHAKESPEARE.

VOL. III.

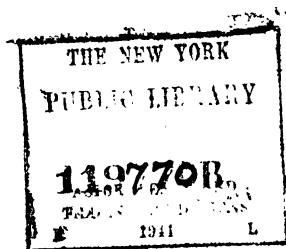
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1847.

EVLS



THE
FEUDS
OF
LUNA AND PEROLLO.

CHAPTER I.

For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing, anxious being ere resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?

GREY.

EVERY care and attention which affection itself could dictate, was exerted by all the inmates of the Casa di Perollo, to relieve the sufferings of the chevalier Landolini, and the distress of his afflicted daughter. The shock he had received when first robbed of his child, had greatly

impaired his constitution. The joyful tidings of her return, and the incessant fatigue and anxiety of mind he suffered in his rapid journey from Trapani, had been more than his weakened health could bear, and a violent fever was the consequence. In a few hours he became delirious, and the physicians, who, from the first, had been far from sanguine, began decidedly to fear that the struggle must terminate in death.

Marguerita wept not; pale as a monumental statue, she sat beside his bed, watched every turn of his countenance, every fluctuation of his pulse, and administered every medicine herself.

Federico, Gaetano, and the baroness, were scarcely less assiduous in their attentions. During three days the disease was rapidly approaching to its crisis; on the fourth the delirium ceased; and when, in a scarcely-audible tone, Marguerita heard the words, "my child," and her father's eyes turned languidly towards her, she felt as if returning reason must be the symp-

tom of returning health ; and falling on her knees beside the bed, she wept upon the burning hand which was extended to her, in a paroxysm of gratitude and hope ; they were the first tears she had shed since he became ill, and relieved her from the oppression with which her heart was loaded. With intense anxiety, but without the alarm she had hitherto felt, she watched the countenance of the physician, who was sent for on this change in the state of his patient ; with a sensation of cold and appalling horror, she saw the same expression of despondency on his features—" My father is—he must be better !" she exclaimed.

" I fear, lady, that no favourable symptoms have occurred ; and," after a pause, he added, " it is my duty to say, I now despair of witnessing any."

" What?" said Marguerita, as if doubting whether she had heard aright. " My father cannot be in danger now !—cannot be beyond your hope !—No ! Providence

has not restored me to his arms only to witness the extinction of my hopes for ever!—Heaven will not thus abandon me!”

Landolini, who was now conscious of all that passed, made an effort to speak; Marguerita bent down, and listened in agony.—“Be composed, my child,” he said; “I feel it is even so—I feel that I am dying.”

“Oh no, no, my dear father; you are weak and low, reduced by your illness, but better, much better, than you were a few hours back.”

“Do not deceive yourself, my child; in a few hours I shall be taken from you; let me see my kind friend, the baron Pandolina.”

Don Giacomo was in a few moments in the apartment; but Landolini was too much exhausted to speak again for some time. Federico was kneeling by the bed, the baroness seated beside it, and Gaetano endeavouring to support his old friend, while the physician administered a restorative, Marguerita having been reduced al-

most to insensibility by the death of her father. Her mother appeared deeply affected at the sight; the business went on silence. Lina extended his hand to the father as he approached the bed, while taking a view of his own affectionately modelled image yet he wept. The sufferer smiled in return and looking at Magdalena made a fruitless effort to articulate.

"I understand you, my friend," said Pardo: "whenever you are in the presence of your sister, Magdalena is my adopted child; in every respect therefore shall she be considered as a daughter of Pedro's house."

"In me," said the business, "she shall always find a mother; I feel deeply interested in her; and had all been well, should still have hoped to have supplied to her the parent she has lost."

"If a brother's love to this adopted sister can be accepted, gladly shall I unite with my family in guarding this sacred charge," added Federico.

cation, and pressing with all his remaining strength his arms round his child, forbade all opposition; and, after a minute or two, he spoke again.—“ Do not grieve for me, my beloved Marguerita; I am going from a world, which has been to me, since my early youth, a scene of trial and distress; but remember always, that those sorrows, great as they were, I brought upon myself—remember that I owe my own sufferings, those of your angel mother, perhaps her death, and, above all, my most intolerable anguish, the leaving you thus early unprotected by a parent’s care, to yielding, in early life, to the indulgence of my own passions. Never, my child, indulge an affection at the expence of its object, or at that of any duty.”

The sympathy of the surrounding friends seemed too great to be repressed; and Landolini had exerted himself till his relaxing hold of all he wished to retain, and his closing eyes, proclaimed that he had again fainted. He remained longer

in a state of insensibility than he had ~~been~~ before, and seemed, if possible, still weaker than after his last recovery.

Don Giacomo took the opportunity of again assuring him, that his Marguerite should hereafter be the object of the tenderest care, and that her present ~~present~~ ~~present~~ should be her future home.

The confessor, who was in attendance, now approached, to perform the duties of his office. Landini acknowledged, by signs, that he was conscious of all that passed, and endeavored in vain to speak.

Marguerita was borne insensible from the room; the looks of her father followed her to the door; and as it shut her from his sight, he sunk upon the bosom of Pignatelli, to rise no more. She was still reclining in the arms of the baroness, and Federico standing by, when don Giacomo came from the apartment of death. He stood for some moments regarding her with the tenderest compassion. Tears

rolled silently down his cheeks; and as Marguerita raised her eyes, she caught the expression of his countenance, and with a scream again threw herself on the bosom of the baroness.

Pandolfina began to speak, but was overpowered by his feelings, and hastily quitted the apartment.

Federico was aware of what had taken place, yet wishing he might still hope, rose, and was advancing towards the door of the room, where the remains of Landolini reposed, when Marguerita, raising herself, exclaimed—"I know it well—I am informed of my misery; take me with you, signor."

"Impossible, at present," said the baroness.

"Your affectionate kindness," said Federico, "will no longer be felt. Why add to your own distress needlessly?"

He took her hand with the kindest sympathy, and with the aid of his mother conducted her, in a state of passive and stupi-

fied misery, to an apartment farther removed from the scene of death.

A cloud of gloom hung for some days over the Casa di Perollo. The obsequies of the cavalier Landolini were performed with the same attention as if he had been related to don Giacomo, and his remains deposited in the cemetery of the Perollo family, with every mark of respect which the baron Pandolfina could pay ; every member of his family attended and mourned as for a kinsman. The grief of Marguerita continued with unabated violence. The kind and parental affection of her guardians, and the fraternal, considerate attentions of Federico and his friend, were unwearied, but generally produced a burst of grief, as if recalling the memory of him whose loss they were intended to supply. —The calm and cheerful devotion of the baroness, without any studied exhortations, first led her thoughts to the only source from which she could derive consolation ; and in the employment of her religious duties, Marguerita found that resignation

and comfort, which, in the earlier days of her sorrow, she had thought never to taste again.

Don Giacomo had taken upon himself the arrangement of her father's affairs, and repeated to her the assurances he had before made, of considering himself henceforth as her parent and protector, replying to her grateful tears with the kindest expressions of the gratification he should feel in fulfilling the duties he had taken upon him.

The baroness, by every means in her power, demonstrated her affection, making no other distinction in her conduct to her adopted child and her own offspring, than the different ages of the parties rendered necessary.

Federico appeared to watch for every opportunity of shewing his entire concurrence in the kind intentions of his family, and his desire to relieve her from the weight of her past sorrows, or any anticipation of evils to come.

Gaetano, who had deeply felt the loss of

Landolini himself, could for some days scarcely look at Marguerita with composure ; his attentions afterwards were not so apparent as those of his friend, but they were not less kind and delicate, never for a moment forgetting his regard for her father, or the situation of his orphaned child.

All intercourse with the Solanto family had, during these sad scenes, been interrupted. The baron had attended the funeral rites with the other friends of Perollo, and the baroness and Costanza sent their inquiries after Marguerita ; but no meeting had taken place, all visitors being excluded from the castle, in the same manner as upon the death of a near connexion of the family.

Marguerita felt all the kindness of her friends, and exerted herself to conceal the poignancy of her grief with all her fortitude and resolution, by which she, in a great degree, recovered her self-command ; and her sorrow, though unabated, was less frequently displayed in public.

The family of Solanto had taken up

their abode in a cassino, beautifully situated in the rocky valley where the hot springs rise, and at about the distance of half a league from Sciacca. It had been the choice of count Luna ; and being the property of his relation Francesco Imbiagnia, every thing was instantly done which could make it convenient to the friends of don Sigismund. At some distance from the other habitations round the baths, it afforded at once every advantage of the springs, quiet, and retirement, which the baroness might require.

Don Sigismund every day spent a considerable portion of time with his mistress, and exerted himself to the utmost to ingratiate himself with all the family.

The countess had made one visit of form, and took occasion to urge the speedy fulfilment of the baron's engagement with her son, both to the father and mother of Costanza ; the latter referred the matter solely to her husband ; and the baron politely declined hurrying on the affair, till the parties so deeply interested

were better informed on the subject of their mutual dispositions.

The friends of don Sigismund had not been backward in shewing every attention to the family. A grand entertainment had been given at the Castel di Luna, in honour of the count's future relatives, at which they were introduced to all the friends and adherents of his house, with the exception of the barons, Adriano and Della Bardia; the former had not appeared publicly at the castle since his fracas with Solanto, and the latter was again absent from the neighbourhood of Sciacca.

The party assembled were none of them persons calculated to interest the Solantos in any way. They consisted chiefly of the nobles of the city, whose conversation was usually details of each other's affairs to all their acquaintance, and abuse of don Giacomo Perollo and his friends; as the latter subject, however, was understood to be the one on which the baron Solanto had expressed such vehement anger against Adriano, it was carefully avoided, except

by oblique hints, shrugs, and ejaculations of horror and antipathy at any allusion to the party's foe.

Some few of the visitors had been occasionally at Palermo, and attended the viceroyal court; they consequently considered themselves as men of the world, and deeply versed in the politics of every European state.

Amongst the company, don Ferrante Luchese was the principal person who attracted the notice of Solanto. He was distantly related to the countess, and warmly attached to the interest of Luna, but without any of the virulent antipathy to the house of Perollo, which generally marked all the friends of don Sigismund. He was introduced to the baron by Geronimo Ferrara, and they were soon mutually pleased with each other. Don Ferrante seemed to appreciate the polished manners of the baron, and his extensive information, derived from the active part he had so long taken in public affairs; while the frank good-nature, and intelligent and rational conversa-

tion, of Luchese, were a considerable relief to Solanto from the unassuming yoke of the barone del Nadore, and many others of the party.

The countess Calabellotta, enveloped in the idea of her own consequence, as presiding over the splendours of Luna Castle, received the homage of such as chose to flatter her, and remained perfectly inattentive to all beside.

The count had attached himself to Costanza, of whom he daily became more enamoured, though he could scarcely hope he was making the slightest progress in gaining her affection.

The weak state of the baroness's health was an excuse for her retiring early; and after a dull and heavy day, the party broke up.

On the next morning the baron and his family returned to their cassino, having remained at the Castel di Luna for the night.

The constant attentions of don Sigismund, though they had made no impres-

sion on the affections of the signora di Solanto, yet had accustomed her to the thoughts of eventually becoming his wife, and to his daily increasing impatience she began to expect her father's resolution must yield ; but in addition to the warning of don Paolo Perollo, the baron himself felt so much difficulty in forming a decided opinion on the character of count Luna, that he was by no means inclined to expedite the affair.

Soon after the funeral of the cavalier Landolini, don Giacomo, his son, and signor Pignatelli, rode down to the cassino, and apologizing for the baroness Pandolina, who stayed at home with Marguerita, made a visit of some length.

The baron Solanto received them with every demonstration of welcome, and they mutually wished that the intercourse between their families might continue and increase ; their regard for each other seemed hourly to become greater ; all the party united in lamenting the unfortunate termination of Landolini's illness, and com-

miserating the affliction of his orphan child, the conversation afterwards turned upon the advantages of their situation for the convenience of the baths, and the short distance from Sciacca. Amongst the thickets, at the northern extremity of the valley, don Giacomo mentioned that there were a considerable number of wild boars, and offered, at the same time, as Solanto had a great taste for hunting, to attend him with his own dogs and huntsmen. The offer was immediately accepted, and an early day appointed for an expedition up the country. The party then took leave, and returned to the city.

On their way they met count Luna, whom they passed, without any notice whatever; and as the train of Pandolfina's attendants went by, they followed the example of their lord, and without salutation or regard held on their way.

Enraged at this neglect, Luna spurred his horse impetuously forward, and felt at the instant as if nothing but the sacrifice of all the house of Perollo could appease

the fury of his rage. In a few moments he began to collect his thoughts, and turning his horse's head from the cassino, rode nearly a league on the road to Liculiani. His attendants, and Pietro Infontanetta, who was with him, followed without comprehending his meaning. At length he halted, and observing to his companion that he had changed his original intention, again turned his course back towards Sciacca.—“The insolence of Giacomo Perollo,” he said, “calls for speedy punishment, and he shall have it to the full; his audacious disregard of me rendered me unfit to meet Solanto's keen inspection; I am now better prepared to play the dissembler; let us return to their abode.”

Pietro assented; and on their way they agreed to make no mention of the meeting with Perollo, but to place it to the long train of grievances they soon hoped to be in a situation to revenge.

Notwithstanding these resolutions, Sigismund was not in a state of mind to enjoy even the society of Costanza, or to

feel sufficiently on his guard to be at ease with her father, and his visit was shorter than any he had yet paid.

When he reached his own home, he vented his rage to his mother and Adriano, in imprecating vengeance and destruction on don Giacomo. His advisers, by promising him his full of both hereafter, soothed him into composure for the present. The next day; his devoirs at the casino were paid without any alteration. Again he urged his suit with Costanza, and pressed her father on the subject, but with no more success than before.

“A few months, signor,” said Solanto, “is but a short probation, considering we have but so lately become personally acquainted; and I prize the happiness of my child too dearly to be precipitate in an affair of such importance to the whole of her future life. I have no hesitation in repeating what has before passed between us, that if, upon a sufficient knowledge of each other, there exists no dislike to the match in either party, I shall most

readily bestow my heiress on the son of my old friend count Luna. This is the engagement, and to this at present I must beg to confine myself."

In vain count Luna used every argument and entreaty in his power, declared his unbounded and unalterable love, and promised a most unhesitating compliance to any preliminary the baron might require. Solanto, however, remained obdurate; and the count again departed without receiving a more favourable answer to his request.

The day previous to the hunting expedition, don Giacomo, being himself particularly engaged, sent Federico and Gaetano down to the cassino, to make the final arrangements with Solanto. The baroness, whose health was already considerably improved by the use of the baths, was sitting with her husband and daughter, and cheerfully entered into conversation with Federico respecting his mother and family. Solanto and Pignatelli were deeply engaged in discussing the merits of dogs, horses,

and hunting spears; and the former requesting Gaetano's opinion of some new purchase, they withdrew to inspect it, the baroness detaining Federico a voluntary prisoner with her.

Soon after the departure of the baron and Pignatelli, Beatrice, thinking the ladies alone, came in. Perollo would have retired, but the baroness said—"I shall be absent only a few minutes, and you had better remain with Costanza, as you might not be able to find the gentlemen."

Left alone with Costanza, Federico felt conscious of something like guilt; he attempted in vain to find some indifferent subject for conversation; the lady seemed equally deprived of all presence of mind; and after two or three attempts to break the distressing silence, they both gave it up in despair, the lady being employed at her embroidery, and the gentleman in looking at her.

At length a step was heard approaching; Perollo began to recover his senses, and Costanza to lose her fears, when the door

opened, and beneath the portal appeared count Luna.

Costanza blushed, she knew not why, and trembled with agitation at the idea of doing so. Federico rose from his seat, stammered some unintelligible nonsense, and looked as if taken in the perpetration of a crime. Sigismund started and turned to an ashy paleness, as he witnessed the evident confusion of those whom he had thus unexpectedly surprised. He had learned from the domestics what guests were at the *cassino*, but having alighted from his horse, he did not choose to remount, and he so evidently driven off by those he considered his enemies; he had therefore advanced to the saloon, expecting to find all the family assembled, but, to his infinite consternation and anger, beheld only Costanza, with Federico Perollo, engaged, as it appeared, in very interesting discourse.

The whole party were for some moments speechless. The lady was the first to recover her recollection, and she said

—"My mother has this instant left the apartment, and will return in a moment; she is only engaged with her servant."

"You, signora, seem to have been well satisfied with the opportunity she has afforded to this treacherous boy to employ his arts and flattery."

"For myself, count Luna," answered Costanza, "I consider your insinuations as no more than the natural effusions of your ill-bred violence, and unfortunate disposition; how my father will approve the insults you may think proper to offer to his friends, I know not."

"Your father's friends, madam, will doubtless find an eloquent and willing defender in yourself, but I must request some further explanation from this gentleman."

"At present, count Luna," answered Federico, "I have no further explanation to give, nor do I comprehend exactly what I am called on to explain; if I consider myself insulted, I shall find some better opportunity to answer it."

The baroness now entered, and gazed with wonder at the scene before her. Costanza's face was flushed with indignation, count Luna violently agitated, and Perollo alone seemed undisturbed. To him she turned an anxious look of inquiry.

"Some misunderstanding," he said, "has excited the count's displeasure."

"No, signora," exclaimed Luna, vehemently, "my doubts have been all cleared up—no misunderstanding exists! Signor Perollo has basely endeavoured to supplant me in the affections of my betrothed wife, and has too fatally, I fear, succeeded. My unexpected arrival has clearly proved his guilty love, and alarmed me with well-grounded fears, that it meets with an approval, which none of her family, I trust, will venture to excuse."

"Your assertions, count Luna," replied Costanza, "are equally false and grating to my feelings; such uncurbed fury; such malignant aspersions on my character, have broken every tie between us. I thank you for the lessons you have given me ;

henceforth you must be the object of my aversion and contempt—Costanza di Solanto renounces and detests you.”

The baron entered during this violent speech of his daughter's. Federico's glowing cheeks had borne witness to the truth of the love he had been accused of. The baroness comprehended nothing but that some event had excited the jealousy of don Sigismund, and the indignation of Costanza. Gaetano alone had some comprehension of the truth. Sigismund attempted an apology to the lady, which was rejected with scorn.

“Address yourself from henceforth to my father, count Luna,” she said; “you have received your dismissal from me; I have been too deeply insulted by your unfounded charges to forget your conduct easily.”

“From whom am I to expect an explanation of this scene?” asked Solanto.

“Let signor Perollo,” said Sigismund, “explain the subject of the interesting

conference, which I so unfortunately interrupted, between himself and the lady Costanza."

"We had scarcely spoken," answered Federico, "during the momentary absence of the baroness Solanto."

"Do you mean to deny your dishonourable love towards the lady?" asked Luna, fiercely.

Federico paused a moment.—"Those who attempt to brand Perollo's name by any title of dishonour," he replied, "should seek some other opportunity than such as now presents itself."

"Do you deny your love to the lady Costanza di Solanto?" again thundered forth don Sigismund.

Again Perollo paused, and, with some hesitation, answered—"Thus rudely questioned, signor, excuse me a reply."

"This discussion, count Luna," said Solanto, "from whatever it arose, should be conducted with more regard to the character of those to whom it is directed."

"My absence, signor," said the baroness,

mildly, " could not have lasted many moments, when you arrived ; believe me, you are acting under some false impression."

Don Sigismund was silent for a few moments.—" If I have been misled," he at length began, " the lady Costanza knows from whence my vehemence proceeded. To prize her favours too highly, is a crime which, I trust, she will not visit so severely as she has threatened."

Costanza did not deign to raise her eyes to the speaker.

" This affair may easily be explained," said the baroness, " when all parties are better disposed to listen. Your own impetuosity, Costanza, must make you more lenient to the same error in another. I think I may venture to undertake the adjustment of the matter ; and first, signor Perollo, let me ask of you what had taken place during my absence?"

" The lady Costanza and myself," replied Federico, " had not exchanged any conversation when count Luna appeared. I was certainly surprised at his entrance,

and made some excuse for our apparently-private interview."

"The jealousy of don Sigismund seemed to have taken alarm; then, at the circumstance of your being alone with Costanza?"

"The evident confusion of the gentleman, and the blushes of the lady," said Luna, "gave me grounds for suspicion, which, if unjustly excited, demand an apology, which I now beg to offer."

At this effort of justice towards Perollo, the blood mounted to the cheeks of Luna, and it was not without great difficulty that he had prevailed on himself to make it.

"My feelings towards you, count Luna," replied Federico, "are only those of amity and concord, and I willingly accept your excuses for such conduct as appearances perhaps might justify."

Costanza still remained silent.—"Come, my love," said the baroness, "you, I am sure, will join in this reconciliation, and forget the circumstances which have occurred."

“ And afford count Luna another opportunity to insult me by his insolent and presumptuous suspicions : your excellenza must excuse me, but it is impossible for me so soon to pass over the indignation which such treatment has called forth.”

The baroness sighed.—“ This spirit, Costanza, is not that which I would have adorn a child of mine.”

“ Costanza will think more correctly and act more mildly upon reflection,” said Solanto ; “ and, in the meantime, we will let the subject subside.” Then turning to Federico, he gave him a message to his father, and an assurance of being ready to attend him at the appointed time.

The young men then took their leave of the family, and with a low bow to don Sigismund, withdrew.

Costanza soon after left the room, not being inclined either to remonstrate with her parents, or listen to the supplications of count Luna.

When she was gone, the baroness offered many excuses for her warmth of temper.

"Do not, signora," said Sigismund, "so severely censure me, as you must do by condemning a disposition which, in every instance, must make my own appear to disadvantage by comparison; besides which, the signora di Solanto is too dear to me, to make it tolerable to hear her blamed, even by you; but lend me your influence both with her and her father, to overcome their perseverance in this cruel delay."

Solanto only shook his head; while the baroness smiled, and assured the count her best endeavours should not be wanting in his service.

After some further conversation, the count withdrew, not perfectly satisfied with the appearance he had observed, though he had seemed to overlook it, in order to sooth the irritation of Costanza.

When don Sigismund had departed, the baroness fulfilled her promise to him, and attempted to obtain Solanto's consent to shorten the period of probation he had resolved on inflicting upon the impatient lover.

The baron was, however, fixed in his determination, and the lady soon after repaired to her daughter's apartment, to make some particular inquiries relative to what had passed during her absence. She found Costanza walking rapidly up and down her room, as if agitating her body would quiet her mind.

On her mother's entrance she blushed, and, as though endeavouring to turn her thoughts from the recent scene, began asking, with great earnestness, about the baron's hunting party.

The baroness answered all her inquiries with great patience and calmness, and then said—"Now, my love, reply to a few questions I have to ask you; I do not tell you to be candid—I know you will; explain to me the real cause of count Luna's anger this morning, for I must confess there seemed to me more understood than expressed by all parties."

"My dearest mother, how should I understand what excited such a temper as

count Luna's to violence? if he had been good-humoured and gentlemanlike, the cause of such a marvel might have been worth seeking."

"Costanza, I did not ask you for an opinion of don Sigismund's temper in general, but for the reason of the violent irritation in which you and he both were on my return."

"Mamma, signor Perollo and I—were—saying nothing—and count Luna came in—and signor Perollo—I mean myself—I looked surprised—I believe, and then he began that insolent accusation which you heard. That is all—except that if signor Federico Perollo had at all resembled in character this odious count Luna, the scene would have ended very differently to what it did."

"Costanza, my child, look at me; what had been the conversation between you and don Federico during my absence?"

"None, mamma," said Costanza, blushing still more; "I do not believe we talked at all."

“ And whence arose this miraculous silence ?”

“ I do not know, mamma—I could not recollect any thing to say.”

The baroness was silent for a minute or two, as if considering what she was to think of Costanza’s altered and embarrassed manner. At last she said—“ Federico Perollo knew of your engagement from the first; surely he cannot have been so base as to endeavour to render the performance of it painful to you ?”

“ I do not think, mamma, that signor Perollo would do any thing base.”

“ If he has ever expressed for you any other sentiments than those of respect and friendship, I cannot call his conduct by any gentler name.”

“ He never professed any sentiments of any kind to me,” said Costanza, endeavouring to exert herself, but feeling a most violent inclination to weep, though she scarcely knew why, “ and indeed he has never said or done any thing that I know

of, which should lessen the good opinion you entertained of him."

"My dearest Costanza," said the baroness, "I have never attempted to deceive you into obedience; the indulgence I have ever shewn to your wishes, and the noble candour you have till now manifested, had made me hope I should never have to deplore your want of confidence in me. Your own heart must accuse the way you are replying to questions which can be dictated by nothing but anxiety for your happiness."

"What can I tell you?" said Costanza, much affected. "If I think that Federico Perollo would not be sorry if I were disengaged, I have only my own thoughts on the subject, for he is too generous to have expressed such a feeling; and if I cannot help comparing him with count Luna, and count Luna always loses by the comparison, what am I to do? I own I do feel under a great restraint with signor Perollo, which I cannot account for

any other way; and when count Luna entered, I dare say I looked confused and uncomfortable; but knowing that I had been using my utmost power over my own feelings, on the side of don Sigismund, I lost all patience at being accused by him, with so little ceremony, and before Perollo too, of encouraging addresses which were never made to me."

"Now, my love, you have answered me. You are in a dangerous situation, but as upright intentions are alone necessary to extricate you, I shall not long be uneasy on the subject. I will not prolong this conversation, or renew it unnecessarily; such subjects do more mischief than they have credit for; you are engaged to count Luna, whose affection for you cannot be doubted, and whose greatest fault is a spirit, to which your own is but too nearly allied; it is therefore your duty to avoid all comparisons to his disadvantage. Signor Perollo departs very shortly for the Milanese, and while he stays, I will take care not to expose you too frequently to

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his society, which I am sorry you find so agreeable—yourself must do the rest.”

Saying this, the baroness embraced her daughter, and returned to the baron, to whom she gave an account of what had passed, and expressed to him a degree of anxiety about her child, which she had not thought it prudent to shew to her.

Every fresh communication made the baron feel less inclined to commit the happiness of his darling Costanza to the risk of a marriage, to which he saw no existing temptation; still, to behave honourably to count Luna, he entirely concurred with the baroness, on the propriety of requesting that Federico would not at present visit them unaccompanied by his family, and this they determined to do, in a confidential communication to the baron and baroness Pandolfina.

CHAPTER II.
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There was a laughing devil in his sneer,
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,
Hope withering fled, and mercy sighed farewell.

BYRON.

AFTER his interview with the countess, Della Bardia set out for Santa Caterina, to claim his prize. The abbess knew too well the character of Accursi d'Amato, and the authority under which he acted, to resist the order, and the novice Francisca was summoned to the parlour of the convent, unconscious of the fate which awaited her.

With astonishment she beheld the terrific figure of Accursi, tall beyond the stature of ordinary men; his gigantic form was awkward and unprepossessing, and his countenance marked by the deep lines of dark and malignant passions; and render-

ed still more repellent by the cadaverous hue of his complexion, seemed, to the timid novice, one of the most appalling objects her fancy could conceive; she was at first so overpowered at his appearance, and at being summoned on such an occasion, that she scarcely heeded the introduction of the abbess.

"The unknown friends," said the superior, "by whom you were placed under my care, and to whom you are indebted for support, have changed their wishes with regard to your future destination, and I am now, my child, to deliver you into the hands of this gentleman, the barone della Bardia."

Francisca looked, almost incredulous, first at the abbess, and then at Accursi; horror and dismay seized all her faculties, and she sunk fainting on the floor.

Della Bardia assisted the superior in raising her, observing, that he was not to be imposed upon by any affected terrors or pious resolutions; and, as soon as she began to recover, desired, that when her

surprise had in some degree subsided, she might be directed to prepare for her departure within two hours.

"A longer delay might be granted by your policy, signor," said the abbess; "I expect it not from your humanity; Francisca is timid, and of a delicate constitution—violence and barbarity may rob you of your prey. I shall not give her up till I see her perfectly restored."

"You will do well, madam, to resist my authority, and that of the natural guardians of this girl," said Accursi, with a sneer.

"I do not mean to resist, signor; but I shall act with some attention to the feelings of humanity, which I lament to see are so totally unknown to you."

Della Bardia withdrew, and left the abbess to recover the fainting novice, who, on her return to sensation, eagerly inquired if she had not been suffering under the effects of a frightful dream?

"You have unnecessarily alarmed yourself, my child," said the superior; "the

friends and relatives you have so frequently wished to see, will now be made known to you ; why should you feel such terrors upon the occasion ?”

“ But to go with that dreadful stranger !” said Francisca, clinging to the abbess, with horror at the remembrance of Della Bardia ; “ oh, hide me from him, and let me wait some other conductor !”

The superior protested that it was impossible to detain her, or to disobey the orders she had received from the lady from whom she had been sent in infancy, and whose plans for her being now changed, it was resolved that she should be introduced to the world, from which she had so long been secluded.

Francisca had been educated with no other idea than that of a monastic life, and with a full belief that in the wicked scenes beyond the walls of her convent, she had no one from whom she had a right to expect either love or protection, and she had long looked forward to the expiration of her noviciate with satisfaction.

To the circumstances of her birth she was a stranger, and had never been able to learn more than that some lady, interested in her fate, had placed her where she was, and in so doing had conferred upon her a favour, which her utmost gratitude could never hope to repay.

The strict rules of Santa Caterina made it no desirable residence for any but such devotees as hoped, by leading miserable lives on earth, to be happy in heaven, and a few profligate females, who trusted, by severe penance and fasting, to wash away the stains of earlier life. Few parents, who condemned their children to a religious seclusion, were so bigoted or so unfeeling as to send them to Santa Caterina.

Francisca therefore seldom had met with a companion of her own age, or with any lighter spirit, who might have inspired her with a wish to join in the pleasures of the world, or the amusements of society. She was surrounded on all sides by gloom and bigotry; beyond the walls she was taught that every place was filled with vi-

olence and crime, and that a conventual life was the only means of peace and happiness, either in heaven or on earth. Her talents had received little or no cultivation, and had not her intellects been naturally strong, she must have sunk into a state of childish fatuity; but her mind was pure from every thought of evil, and her patience and fortitude had been severely tried in this school of fanatic bigotry. The lives and martyrdom of all the saints and virgins in the calendar, were the only examples ever held up to her imitation; yet from them she learned resolution and perseverance in her career of religion and virtue, unamiable as they might appear in the characters by whom she was surrounded.

The superior of the convent had generally treated her with all the kindness the rules of the sisterhood permitted, and habit had fixed the affection of the novice upon her, and two or three of the other nuns; having no other object to call forth, or rather to receive the natural effusions

of youthful feelings, they had been placed upon such of her associates as seemed best inclined to foster them. But the nuns of Santa Caterina had few of them any worldly affections remaining; superstition and fanaticism reigned without one rival feeling within them; and cool indifference had often repaid the warmth of Francisca's love.

Notwithstanding the inmates of her convent were thus repulsive and unprepossessing, still the thoughts of being torn from the only home she had ever seen, from the only friends she had ever known, from the abode of her youth, and the boundary of her wishes, was a shock so violent and unexpected, that she knew not how to think or act under it. Sorrow would have predominated, had not a more powerful sensation of alarm possessed her mind, arising from her dread at the thoughts of being entrusted to such a person as the barone.

It was in vain that the abbess strove to compose her, by assuring her that she

would receive every attention where she was going, and that she would still be under the protection of the lady, whose care had attended her through her early years, and, in all probability, would soon meet with other friends, and perhaps relatives, from whom she would receive the greatest kindness.

In spite of the representations of the superior, Francisca sat weeping and lamenting her destiny, and protesting that no power should divert her from her intention of taking the veil, and returning to her convent, from whence she considered it as sacrilege to take her.

By command of the abbess, her slender wardrobe was soon in readiness, the novice herself being unable to attend to anything. Her conductor at length reappeared, and terror stopped the lamentations of Francisca; speechless, pale, and trembling, she received the adieus of the sisterhood, and, with a convulsive shudder, was supported to a litter at the convent gate, in which she was placed by Della

Bardia, who did not appear to perceive her agitation, or, if he perceived it, did not deign to notice it.

In the evening they halted at a small village near Santa Margarita, where the barone was more attentive to the wants and wishes of his companion than he had been during the journey.

Francisca had in some degree recovered her composure, and resolved within herself the conduct she intended to pursue. She expected soon to see the lady who had always been considered as her guardian and protectress, and hoped, by declaring her fixed determination to persist in taking the veil, that she should be permitted to return to her convent.

Her fellow-traveller exerted himself to amuse her. He congratulated her upon her release from the convent, and the prospect of being introduced to the world, from which she had been so long secluded.

This produced a vehement declaration of her abhorrence of the pleasures of soci-

ety, and her resolution to live and die within the walls of Santa Caterina.

A little more knowledge on the subject, and the experience of a few days, Accursi observed, would soon dissipate these spiritual notions.—“The wishes of your friends, lady,” he said, “will find a powerful support from the temptations around you, and the gaieties of the world obliterate the visions conjured up by the superstition and hypocrisy of the old nuns of Santa Caterina.”

This was the first time Francisca had ever heard an idea that the society she had quitted were not the most perfect and most fortunate of human beings. She looked in wonder at the dark countenance of Accursi d'Amato, and fancied that the foul fiend himself must have been permitted to take possession of his person, and crossed herself with devotion at his profane remark.

“At San Bartolomeo, whither we are going,” he continued, “you will find but

little society; I hope, however, soon to take you to Sciacca, where you will be introduced to the friends and connexions of both our families."

"You know then, signor, to whom I owe my origin?" exclaimed Francisca, with joyful satisfaction. "Shall I indeed see my parents and relations?"

"This," he replied, "is no place for explanations; when we arrive at Santo Bartolomeo, you shall be informed of all you wish to know; but we must begin our travels early; you had therefore better retire to your couch, signora; and be assured that all your anxiety shall be fully quieted in a short time, and your curiosity satisfied, when we shall hear no more, I trust, of returning to Santa Caterina."

The novice began again to eulogize the happiness of her old abode, in the same strains she had so frequently heard it extolled.

Accursi listened with impatience for a short time, and in the midst of the ha-

rangue wished her good-night, and retired, sending in a female attendant to assist the lady in preparing for the short interval allowed for her repose.

In vain Francisca attempted to compose herself to sleep. The present and future prospects which had dawned upon her during the last few hours, so entirely occupied her thoughts, that it was impossible to exclude them, and daybreak found her still waking and restless. She was soon summoned to rise and set forward; and during a long and fatiguing day, she was shut up in her litter, except for a short time at noon, when they halted at Sambuca to rest themselves and their horses.

Towards evening they began to ascend the dreary heights of Santo Bartolomeo, in the deepest recesses of which stood the castle belonging to the barone della Bardia; a few miserable hovels in a valley beneath the castle were the only traces of human habitation, and these resembled the huts of a wandering tribe, rather than the abodes of civilization.

Francisca had been always accustomed to the gloom and melancholy of Santa Caterina ; therefore, perhaps the scene made less impression upon her than it would have done on any other person ; yet as she passed under the dark and ruined archway into the courtyard, which was covered in places with fragments of the tottering building, the air of desolation struck even her ; and the few persons who appeared had the same fierce and military aspect which characterized her travelling companion. The whole looked more like a robber's den than the establishment of a feudal baron.

As Accursi lifted Francisca from her litter, he observed to her, that he hoped the exterior appearance of her future home would soon be more prepossessing ; and conducting her through a dark hall, they passed two or three desolate apartments ; and finally entered one, which, though somewhat better, was cheerless and gloomy in the extreme.

After some apparent difficulty in finding her, an old woman entered the room, and received Della Bardia's orders to attend entirely upon the lady, until he could procure for her some more suitable waiting-woman—"Mine has hitherto," he said, "been a bachelor's establishment, and you will find the castle in some disorder; but we shall soon make it more habitable, signora, and, for the present, you will excuse its want of accommodation. I have affairs of importance, which require my attention this evening, but you will give whatever orders you think necessary, and they shall be obeyed to the extent of our ability." He then took his leave of the astonished girl, who, wearied by her journey, terrified at her novel situation, and ignorant of every thing around her, was incapable of answering; and seating herself on the nearest chair, gave free course to her tears for some time.

The old woman, standing by, in nearly equal surprise, but her volubility soon getting the better of her reserve, she prated

most loquaciously to the almost-unheeding Francisca.—“ I never did expect such doings as this,” she began, “ that ever I should live to see a real lady mistress of the old Castle of Santo Bartolomeo ; but they do say, that your excellenza has gold and jewels enough to build up the battered walls again, as fine as any thing in Sciacca. To be sure, I did think it was all a story, invented by that fellow Giuseppe, to make me guess and wonder, when he told me that his excellenza was going to marry an angel, as rich as the madonna di Trapani, who was, for aught he knew, a daughter of the emperor, or the viceroy ; but when I was bid to put the best furniture into this room, and the great bed in the next was dusted and cleaned, I thought there might be something in it, and perhaps the arcone was about to bring home another smart lady from Palermo, such as he has once or twice before ; but, bless me ! your excellenza is quite another thing ; and when I heard just now that there really was a priest in the castle, I could not tell

which way to turn me; and so I sat still in the room over the gateway to watch your arrival—not that I expected to see you; and though they searched all over the castle, they would never have found me, only I thought I might as well come and look at my lord's new bride."

"You are mistaken then," said Francisca, still weeping. "I am not, nor do I mean to be, any one's bride; I am a novice, belonging to Santa Caterina. Why I am brought here, I know not; but when I see my friends, I presume I shall be informed."

"But your excellenza has untold sums of gold, and mines of wealth?" asked the old woman.

"I neither know of, nor wish to possess the treasures of the world," said Francisca; "only let me return to Santa Caterina, and I shall be happy."

The old woman stared as if doubting the sanity of the young lady, who expressed a wish to retire to rest, hoping thereby to escape from her attendant.

“ Your excellenza will take some food first ; I will go and see what can be found,” she said, and withdrew.

During her absence, the new inmate of Santo Bartolomeo looked round her apartment, into which, she had just been told, the best furniture in the castle had been removed. The tapestry hangings consisted of various fragments of various stories, put up by the taste of old Beatrice, wherever the original covering had fallen from the walls. Warriors upon their chargers, with their legs in the air, were grouped with tattered apostles, and moth-eaten scenes of farms and vineyards. The few chairs were those which had been selected as most fit for service, from various sets ; and a table, which would stand without much trouble, completed the sumptuous display.

The air of abandoned and desolate misery struck even the novice from Santa Caterina. In her convent she had been accustomed to every deprivation of the comforts, as well as the luxuries of life, yet

still there was order, and some idea of neatness, in the humble pallet and slender furniture of their cells; and the parlour, and apartments of the abbess, were decently, though simply arranged.

The old woman arrived at length with a most enormous dish of oglio, which appeared to have been prepared for all the ruffian-like domestics in the courts below, and a bottle of execrable wine. Francisca had not been accustomed to dainty fare; she therefore thankfully partook of the viands offered her, and was conducted by Beatrice into the adjoining room, where the state bed had been dusted out for her reception. The appearance of this room was much in the same style as the one she had quitted.

"His excellenza," said the old woman, "never resided much at Santo Bartolomeo till of late; he used formerly to spend his time in Sciacca; and my husband and I kept the castle in order; but now we have the barone himself, and his friend count Morgio, and all their attendants, or sol-

diers, as they call themselves. It was a fine surprise to me, as your excellenza may suppose, when they came clattering up to the castle in the dead of night; and then there was so much consulting and debating with my husband, and such searching for keys, and exploring all the old holds, that I could never make out what they meant, or where they put the poor man who was brought with them, so muffled up, that I never got a glimpse at his face, though I peeped at every opportunity."

Francisca could not avoid hearing all this gossip, though it made but little impression on her; and having performed her evening services, and secured the door after the departure of old Beatrice, she retired to rest. She did not see the barone till late the next day, which she spent almost entirely alone, and much in the same way as she would have done at Santa Caterina, in devotional exercises. It appeared to her singular that her friends should have taken her from her convent to im-

mure her in a ruinous castle, with only a man like Della Bardia; but she had been exercised in patience, and now found the benefit of that which she had acquired.

When Accursi entered, he excused himself slightly for his absence, which business, he said, had rendered necessary.

"When may I expect to see the friends to whom I am related?" asked Francisca.

"It will not be long before you will be introduced to them," he replied; "and in the meantime, I hope you will not find this so uncomfortable a residence as it at first appeared."

"You promised me, signor, an explanation of several circumstances, to which I am at present a stranger."

"And it is my intention to fulfil it," said Accursi; "but you, lady, must first obey the injunction of your unknown mother."

"In all things I am prepared to honour and be obedient to her," answered Francisca.

"I am happy," said Accursi, "to find

the abbess has not failed in her duty here; your professions, signora, are now to be proved; you must accompany me to the altar, and instantly become the wife of Della Bardia."

The novice was for a few minutes silent; she had rallied all her presence of mind, all her composure, to hear the expected intelligence of her family and origin, to meet the terrific barone, and to learn the intentions of her friends. She had spent the greater part of the day in prayer, and felt, when she began the conversation, as if capable of bowing in humble resignation to the event, whatever it might be; but when she heard the price she was expected to pay for the introduction to her friends, the suddenness of the shock for a moment overpowered her. Her mind, however, was firm and decided; she considered herself devoted to the altar, and resolutely determined to resist, like the numberless virgins with whose histories she was so well acquainted, even to martyrdom, any matrimonial connexion.

This resolution she announced, in firm yet gentle terms, to Della Bardia, who replied, with a shout of derision—"Most pious lady, we have, it is true, neither racks nor executioners to try your fortitude, but the power of Accursi d'Amato is not to be resisted by a child. My friends are waiting in the chapel below, the priest is in readiness, and you must instantly attend me thither."

Francisca knelt, but not to Della Bardia, in humble supplication; she bent to Heaven for aid and support in this hour of trial.

"Now for a miracle, holy Santa Caterina!" exclaimed Accursi, "to save your credit, and your votary's virgin fame."

"No miracle," replied Francisca, meekly, "is requisite to support a resolution which defies your tyranny, signor, and is fixed on Heaven alone."

As she spoke, a hasty footstep was heard advancing to the door; the novice's heart fluttered with hope; the countenance of Accursi fell; an armed attendant appear-

ed at the entrance.—“A courier from Bivonia requires your excellenza’s immediate attention.”

“He must wait,” exclaimed the barone, furiously; “neither earth nor Heaven shall stop my purpose now!”

The man retired.

“Your saint,” continued Della Bardia, with a sneer of derision, “must find some other means to save you, lady; this but accelerates your doom.”

He took her hand with a grasp, which she found it vain to resist, and led her from the apartment.

As they advanced through the desolate chambers, the novice looked round for aid, but saw only a few ferocious-looking men, and they arrived at the chapel, where a priest was waiting their approach. With him was a tall man in armour, and two or three persons, who appeared to be subaltern officers.

“The lady Francisca di Luna,” said Accursi, leading her up to the principal person.

“ My friend, count Giorgio, lady, who honours our nuptials by his presence. Proceed,” he continued to the priest; “ I have a summons to attend to, the instant that this ceremony is concluded; therefore, good father, make no delay in the duties of your office.”

“ Hear me, father,” said Francisca.

“ Silence, lady!” said Accursi, with a frown.

“ No, signor, I will not be silenced.— Father,” she continued, “ I here protest, before the blessed Virgin, that I am the consecrated spouse of God. I have been forced from my convent, by whose authority I know not, and am now dragged hither by one who has neither natural nor acquired right over me. I demand your assistance to restore me to my convent; and I protest, in the name of all the blessed saints above, against the further proceeding of the ceremony.”

The party stood for a moment in silent astonishment.

"These objections," at length said the priest, "are most powerful."

"And thus I answer them," exclaimed Accursi, vehemently drawing his sword, and seizing the monk. "Either proceed without delay, or meet your fate. This is only the prate of a wayward girl. At your peril, father, delay the solemnization of the nuptials! You know under whose sanction we act."

The priest opened the book, and in a tremulous voice began.

Another difficulty now arose: Francisca throughout refused her approbation and consent at every response she was required to make. The monk hesitated.

"You are to attend to me alone," said the barone, and again his sword gleamed before the eyes of the terrified father.

When this mockery had ceased, Della Bardia called on the priest to draw up an attestation of the act, which was signed by count Giorgio and the attendant witnesses, in spite of all the protestations and appeals of the lady.

The barone received the document, and carefully looked it over, then folded it up; and turning to the ruffians, behind him, said—"Bear this most scrupulous good man to the deepest dungeon of the castle, and secure him in fetters; we have no further occasion for his services, and his babbling tongue may be inconvenient hereafter."

The men advanced, and seized the trembling priest, who gave one shriek as they threw a cloak over him, and forcibly bore him away.

"Allow me, baroness della Bardia, to conduct you from the chapel," said count Giorgio.

Without heeding him, Francisca again threw herself upon her knees before the crucifix, and remained some minutes undisturbed.

Accursi spoke a few words apart to the count, and left him to conduct the lady to the other part of the castle.

"We have important business, signora," he said, "which requires the immediate

attention of your lord and myself; I am sorry to interrupt your thanksgivings, but you must permit me to conduct you from hence."

The novice rose without further delay; she threw back the veil with which she had been covered; and looking steadily at the count, said—"I am unacquainted with the world, signor, but in my retirement have always heard that noblemen and soldiers were honourable, brave, and generous; from the conduct of yourself, and of the person who forced me hither, I must suppose that I have fallen into the hands of brigands and banditti, and have cause indeed to be thankful to the Power which has afforded me strength to resist the tyrannous attempt to make me the wife of your friend. The same Power will, I doubt not, deliver me from his hands. I am ready to attend you."

He then led her to the apartment she had quitted when forced away by Accursi, and Beatrice attended her. The count instantly withdrew in search of Della Bar-

dia, and Francisca seated herself, in silent meditation at the scene she had gone through, and anxious deliberation on her future proceedings. Last night she had wept bitterly at the bare idea of being removed from Santa Caterina; she had now shed no tear during all the violence to which she had been exposed, but, on the contrary, felt her spirits supported by a strength hitherto unknown to her; and hopeless as her situation seemed, she suffered neither despondency nor fear to the degree she might have expected; her firm reliance on Providence was unabated by danger and difficulty, and she calmly awaited succeeding events.

About an hour she continued undisturbed, when the clatter of horses in the courts below drew the attention of the old woman—"Bless me!" she exclaimed, "what a bustle there is! Why all the men are armed, and seem as if preparing for some grand expedition."

The barone entered the apartment as he was speaking—"Your brother," he

said, "signora, count Sigismund di Luna, requires my immediate attendance at Bivonia; he is my near kinsman, and the head of our illustrious house. Exclusive of our new connexion, I am bound to him by the strongest ties, and am now about to hasten to his aid with all my vassals and adherents. My return is uncertain, but shall not be unnecessarily delayed; you will, in the mean time, remain mistress here. One thing only I have to caution you against; all hopes of escape are now fruitless; you are my lawful wife, and any attempt of the sort which you may engage in, will be visited by my heaviest displeasure. Adieu! I have no moments for delay."

Francisca was about to speak, but he hastily left the apartment; the notes of a bugle, which sounded in the court, appeared to be the signal for departure. The clattering of horses on the pavement increased; she heard them thunder over the drawbridge, and all was again silence round her.

Thankful for her present release from persecution, by the departure of the baron, Francisca gratefully offered up her prayers to Heaven, and commended her future destiny to the same protecting Power which had hitherto defended her. The parting words of Della Bardia had informed her of her origin, and the name of her family; but she was an utter stranger to all the world, excepting the inmates of Santa Caterina; and don Sigismund di Luna was to her almost as remote a person as the emperor Charles; he was, however, some connexion on whom she had a claim, and eagerly and anxiously did she question Beatrice as to her knowledge of him and his family. To her great satisfaction, it was a subject on which the old woman could give her information. From two or three visits to Sciacca, and from the circumstance of his being the chieftain of Della Bardia's family, he was an object of interest to all the vassals; and with much embellishment, and no small additions, the attendant manu-

factured a complete detail of all the affairs of the house of Luna.

The novice learned, that at least she had a mother, and many powerful relations; and fully confided in their future compliance with her wishes to reassume at her convent the life from which she had been torn. Her time during the eventful day, and several which succeeded, was uniform and undisturbed; the only person she saw was Beatrice, and her principal conversation was respecting the newly-found relatives, whose names only excited so much interest.

To return to the affairs of Sciacca. On the day after the encounter of Federico and Sigismund, don Giacomo and his party accompanied the baron Solanto on his hunting expedition; and, after a fatiguing but successful day, returned to the *cassino*.

Don Sigismund had been there during their absence, and endeavoured, by every means in his power, to appease the anger of Costanza, but her mother's authority

could alone make her listen to him ; and she would only engage to overlook his late conduct, upon such a continuance of better temper as might manifest an improvement in his powers of self-command. He had retired before the return of the hunters, and the baroness took the earliest opportunity, unperceived by the rest of the party, to speak to Federico upon the subject of Costanza, and the jealousy of count Luna.

Perollo blushed deeply when she first mentioned the subject ; the baroness appeared not to regard it, and gave him every possible credit for his honourable intentions, and for having innocently caused the disagreeable scene which had taken place.

Federico attempted an apology, but could not produce an intelligible sentence.

The baroness perceived his agitation, and proceeded in the conversation—"Under the peculiar circumstances in which we are placed in regard to both families, bound by the strongest ties of gratitude to your

father and yourself, and connected by our engagements with count Luna, it is an imperious duty, signor Perollo, which calls upon the baron Solanto to act with honour and confidence to all parties, neither to provoke the irritable feelings of count Luna, by giving him unnecessary pain, nor in any way to fail in shewing every testimony of friendship towards the house of Perollo. Much also is due to the feelings and the character of our daughter; and I shall not, I hope, be thought acting either with harshness, ingratitude, or suspicion, if I request you to avoid, as much as possible, the society of my child." Perollo started, and shewed violent signs of agitation. The lady continued—"It is neither from a want of confidence in your honour or generosity, signor, that I am tempted to urge the necessity of your withholding from all particular attention, either in public or private, but from a regard to the peace of all parties—to count Luna, to yourself, and to Costanza."

Federico had bowed assent to all that

the baroness had said, but without trusting himself to answer her. She now paused for a reply, but all he could say was a disjointed sentence, in which he acknowledged the justice of her opinions, and promised obedience to her wishes.

The truth was now but too evident to the mother of Costanza, and she trembled for the event.—“Remember, signor Perollo,” she said, “I rely confidently upon your honour and discretion.”

Don Giacomo requested to have his attendants summoned, as he was impatient to return. His son gladly took advantage of the circumstance, and in a short time the party left the casino.

Costanza quitted the room when she saw the effect her mother’s conversation had upon Federico, whose countenance she had watched when she could do so unperceived. He had thus escaped the necessity of taking leave of her; and during his ride home, endeavoured to recover his spirits; but fearing to excite the inquiries of his mother, as soon as he arrived there,

he pleaded fatigue from the exertions of the day, and retired to his own apartment.

The baroness Pandolfina had, however, learned from Gaetano the events of the preceding day, and had considered them with deep and painful interest. Some days after the hunting, she succeeded in persuading Marguerita to accompany her for the first time to the cassino.

Costanza, who sympathized sincerely in the sorrow of Landolini's orphan, exerted every power she possessed to amuse and relieve her thoughts, which gave the baroness Solanto the means of a long conversation with her friend, in which the two ladies discussed the subject of Federico's unfortunate attachment, and his mother engaged to exert her influence to prevent his visiting at the cassino, or having any intercourse with Costanza, except such as their meeting in public rendered unavoidable and unsuspecting.

Soon after the departure of the ladies, don Giacomo, don Paolo Perollo, and

signor Pignatelli, arrived at the *cassino*. Solanto, who had been out for an hour or two, was returned, and the party were engaged in general conversation, when count Luna entered the saloon. A silence immediately ensued.

The count slightly saluted Solanto and the ladies, and turning fiercely towards don Paolo, said—"I am happy, signor, in this public opportunity of demanding satisfaction at your hands, for the injury which I have been informed you in private sought to render me, by insidiously seeking to discover the secret transactions of my family, and exposing them where they might most materially injure me, and forward the interest of your friend and kinsman with this lady," pointing to Costanza.

"Less intemperate language, count Luna," answered don Paolo, calmly, "might have suited both yourself and me more properly than that which you have now thought fit to use. I should not think it necessary to reply to your attack, but that

I consider myself as bound in duty to the baron Solanto to explain my conduct towards him. I did, signor," he continued, addressing Solanto, "a short time ago, request you not to precipitate your engagement with count Luna; my motive for so doing I did not state at the time, nor did I allege any cause, or produce any accusation against the count himself, or any one connected with him; I am now most willing to account for this conduct, and to give my reasons for acting in the manner I have done."

"I require no explanation, signor," said Solanto; "the character of don Paolo Ferollo stands too high in reputation to make me doubt his honour or his judgment."

"But I am not thus to be evaded!" exclaimed the count, with vehemence, "and again demand an explanation!"

"For my own sake, I beg I may explain the motives which urged me to address you on the subject, baron Solanto," said don Paolo. "I had received infor-

mation from a friend, that a lady nearly connected with the count was in existence, the production of whom would materially affect the interest of your daughter and yourself; and I was at the time requested to state thus much to your *excellenza*. The proofs upon the subject were probable, but not decisive, and I was unwilling, until further information could be laid before you, to pledge myself to any thing which could imply dishonourable secrecy in the family of count Luna, or hereafter be altogether refuted. I therefore contented myself with requesting that some delay might be made, which would afford time for other knowledge to be obtained upon this most mysterious subject; but I neither sought for the intelligence which was given me, or received it through a dishonourable channel."

"And who is this unknown lady, who has risen from the grave to interrupt my negotiations with the baron Solanto?" replied Luna, with insolent contempt.

"That, signor," replied don Paolo, "can

only be answered by those members of your family who are acquainted with the secrets of the affair."

"From whom did the information come, and who but a madman would have believed so improbable a tale?"

Federico was about to interfere, but don Paolo prevented him; and his father took up the contest.

"If my kinsman can stand by and bear your impertinence with patience, Sigismund di Luna, it is more than I can do," said don Giacomo, losing his temper.

The baroness tried to intercede, and Solanto requested count Luna to restrain his impetuosity.

"I long have borne Perollo's insolence!" said Sigismund, furiously; "it was but lately he passed me unsaluted in the city gate, and all his dissolute followers did the same, imitating the disrespect their ruffian chief dared to offer to my superior rank."

"Myself and my attendants," answered don Giacomo, "shewed all the respect which we considered due to the illustrious

don Sigismund ; but, for superior rank, it is a point on which I am disposed to yield to none in Sciacca; no, not to count Calta-bellotta, Bivonia, Selafani, and Caltaventura, who, with all his high pretences, I must confess I hold in slight esteem."

"Don Giacomo Perollo shall soon be taught another lesson, and repent this insolence," said Luna.

"It must be some other than a maniac, who shall teach me humility and submission."

Solanto exhorted Perollo, and commanded his antagonist to hear him; the baroness added her entreaties, and Costanza, alarmed at the increasing violence of the parties, endeavoured to exert her influence over don Sigismund, whilst Paolo Perollo strove to moderate the anger of his kinsman.

"Is it thus, count Luna," asked Costanza, "that your promises are kept? Is this the regard you profess to shew in all things to my feelings and my wishes? and is such violence intended to disprove the

story your friends have sent abroad respecting this unknown female?"

"Torture me not by your reproaches, lady Costanza!" said Sigismund: "can I calmly listen to the aspersions these malignant enemies would cast upon my character? can I endure this insulting abuse? and would you persuade me to humble myself before these hereditary foes? but, above all, am I, without resenting it, to suffer their interference to delay my happiness, or, perhaps, eventually to deprive me of that which I value above all things, your affection and regard? No, Perollo," he continued, turning to don Giacomo, "the vengeance of Luna and Peralta has slept too long; you have at length awakened it, and the extermination of one or both our parties can alone extinguish the deadly feud between us."

"Your most heroic resolutions, signor," said Giacomo, more coolly, "are doubtless formed with infinite wisdom, and will be executed with equal valour and judgment. But we will no longer disturb these ladies

by our broils ; when next we meet, illustrious count Luna, you shall not find Perollo wanting in respectful salutations. Forgive me, my friends," he added, addressing himself to Solanto and his family, " for the intemperance into which this encounter has betrayed me. I have some affairs to arrange, a league from hence, and must be in Sciacca by a certain hour."

He then took his leave, and, attended by his friends, pursued his journey along the road, towards Caltabellotta, to a country-seat belonging to Vicentino Cubrici, where he had appointed to meet some members of his family, and his adherents, Matteo Benfari, Giovanni di Reggio, Giacomo di Palermo, and Di Visco, a Spanish relative of the baroness Pandolfina.

Don Sigismund remained at the cassino a short time after the departure of Perollo, and entered into a long and vehement justification of himself. Costanza had withdrawn, but the baroness remained, and endeavoured to remove the displeasure of Solanto, and sooth the irritation of Sigis-

mund against the family of don Giacomo.

“ However disposed I might be, signor,” observed the baron, “ to forgive your indignation at the report to which don Paolo alluded, yet there was nothing in his conduct to justify your violence towards him, or your threats of vengeance against my friend don Giacomo; and although I fully exculpate you from the suspicion of any dishonourable transaction, yet the history of this unknown female must be another objection against any conclusive engagements with you, even were the great obstacle of temper removed, of which, I must say, I now see no hopes.”

The prospect of losing Costanza increased the tumult in the breast of Luna; he vowed to sacrifice to his fury the author of such an unfounded falsehood, be he whom he might; and, after the most urgent supplications to Solanto and the baroness, to judge his conduct more leniently, and to intercede with their daughter, he hastily took his leave, and mounting

his horse, returned, with all speed, to Luna Castle, to endeavour instantly to unfold the history of this secret female, and to prove its total want of foundation.

Impatiently he sought the apartment of his mother, with whom he found her kinsman, Marco Luchese, and, without preface or hesitation, declared that the information he had received, respecting the private inquiries made by Paolo Perollo, was true—that he confessed to have listened to some secret spy—that he had reported his opinion to Solanto—delayed the completion of his engagement with Costanza—and, finally, attempted to justify himself, by alleging in excuse that he had heard of the existence of some lady, nearly connected with the house of Luna, whose life or death would materially affect the interest of the future countess.

An exclamation of horror and surprise from his mother arrested the voice of Luna.—“Is it thus the villain Della Bardia seeks his revenge?” she exclaimed, and endeavoured to escape from the room.

Luna caught her arm, and forcibly detaining her, demanded, in a voice scarcely audible from agitation—"Has Lucretia risen from her grave?"

With a look of guilty terror the countess inquired his meaning.

"To whom should the report allude, but to her?" replied Luna.

His mother perceived the direction of his thoughts, and instantly recovered her self-possession—"It is all an invention of the Perollo, to destroy the confidence of Solanto, to break his engagement with you, and to secure his daughter to the son of Giacomo."

The sudden change in the manner of his mother struck Sigismund with suspicion.—"There must have been some ground for the tale," he said; "I would not credit the oaths of all the rest of their united party; but the word of don Paolo, and his general character, though he bears the name of Perollo, persuade me that we have some traitor in our confidence, who has given rise to the report, though from what

motive or foundation appears inexplicable. Your excellenza mentioned the name of Della Bardia, as if suspicious of his faith."

The countess seemed again thrown off her guard for an instant, and said—"I have no trust in Accursi d'Amato, when his interest or his malignity may tempt him to betray his friends."

"The baron della Bardia," answered Sigismund, "has ever been a firm and zealous partisan, sincerely attached to our cause; what should induce him to invent this fable?"

"I did not mean," replied the countess, hesitating, "to accuse him, or any of our friends, of that which has its origin only in Perollo; I was alluding to other events, between myself and Della Bardia, with which no one else has any concern. I doubt not but this report may soon be traced, and proved to have originated in Paolo himself, though you seem so well-disposed to exonerate him from the charge, and fix it on your friends. The deepest injury these deadly foes can do, will be to

sow suspicion in you, my son, against our nearest kinsmen and connexions; I would advise you instantly to follow Adriano, who cannot be far upon the road; bring him back to Sciacca, and be guided by his advice."

"Has Adriano departed?" asked Sigismund.

"Almost an hour ago," said Luchese, and offered to attend the count, if he wished to overtake him.

The countess, anxious to get rid of the discussion, and to have some time for reflection on her own best method of proceeding, urged her son to seek Peralta instantly.

Attended by Luchese and two domestics, he immediately rode from the castle, leaving the city by the Porta degli Bagni. When near the convent of San Francisco, without the walls, they encountered the returning party of Perollo.

CHAPTER III.



Oh, wise was the founder, and well said he,
Where there are women, mischief must be.

Queen's Wake.

RECOGNISING instantly the party of Perollo, Lupa spurred his horse to its utmost speed, endeavouring to ride violently through the crowd around don Giacomo, who exclaimed loudly to his attendants—
“ Here is this illustrious personage again ; let us watch his motions, and salute him as he desires, and his great worth demands :” and immediately turning his horse, he rode back with all his band.

At the distance of a bowshot he halted on the little plain behind the church of St. Barnabas, and ordered such of his men as had fire-arms with them to discharge them in the air ; and as Luchese and the servants of don Sigismund passed, the ad-

herents of don Giacomo pursued them by the most insulting shouts and cries.

Luna, furious at this outrage, halted an instant, and, with a tremendous oath, vowed, in the destruction of all Perollo's name, to raise an eternal monument to his revenge, and then took the road to Bivonia, without addressing a word to his companions, and apparently forgetful of the original intention with which he had set out.

"I hope we have now saluted the most noble count with all the distinction he desires," said the baron, as, with his party, he retook the road to Sciacca. "Paolo, you look grave; was it not right to pay the deference that sweet youth demands to his pre-eminent greatness?"

"I cannot help wishing," said don Paolo, "that your excellenza treated that unhappy temper of count Luna with the compassion it deserves, or, at least, that you had not given it the consequence of such notice as that which has just passed."

"Why, Paolo, would you have me submit to be braved and defied by a Luna—

by the hereditary foe of my family? and besides, there was something so delightfully absurd in a man, in a transport of jealous rage about his mistress, going out of his way to quarrel with me about a salutation last week in the city gate; surely it was right to indulge the young gentleman in his love of such ceremonies."

"That he is a Luna, and that the Luinas and Perollos were foes, is just what I wish you would forget," said don Paolo; "it appears to me the most unreasonable thing in the world, that because our great-grandfathers quarrelled, we should be condemned to perpetual enmity to a person of don Sigismund's disposition; my interference (which has doubtless been represented to him under every false and aggravating form) could hardly fail to be irritating; but, as I do believe him generous and sincere, when he had discovered the truth (of which I believe him now completely ignorant), it is most likely he would himself have repented his intemperance."

"Perhaps he might," said Pandolfina ;
" but I confess it appears to me full as likely that he would not, and, in the mean time, I cannot say I have any inclination to be subject to his insolence ; he is just the most disagreeable fellow I ever met with, and certainly I should feel no objection to the task of correcting him ; his temper is very unfortunate perhaps, and the sooner he gets a new one the better ; I have no patience with such violent hot-headed fools, who, precisely because they cannot keep their own tempers, or do not think it worth while to try, suppose every one else must submit to their humours."

"I fear your desire of attempting his correction will not long be denied you," answered don Paolo, "for certainly this quarrel will not end here, and if it involved only ourselves, as it would perhaps give us the satisfaction of ridding the city of Adriano, Della Bardia, and a few more of the party, I am not sure I should regret it. But it will involve much distress to many

who have only to obey, and can derive but little advantage from our contest."

"Those you mention, who have only to obey, are the very people who are most fond of the amusement of fighting," said don Giacomo; "but do tell me, Pignatelli, what you think of it?"

"Why I am afraid," answered Gaetano, "that don Paolo is right in his argument; but I should certainly have acted like your excellenza."

"Oh, Paolo always ends *par avoir raison*," said the baron; "and if he could persuade us all to be as rational and as good as himself, I should not despair of seeing that old demon the countess, in Spanish costume, bearing to the font some infant heir of a Perollo, or honouring me with private conferences, as she does Della Bardia; but since that will not be easily accomplished, we must prepare, I fear, for a few broken heads."

"I should hardly have thought it possible," said Paolo, "to have wished your temper other than it is, my kinsman; but

indeed you are more wrong than will be seen at present ; the best advantage to be drawn from good temper is not to be ruffled by the bad ; if you were like count Luna, you could but be provoked to hostility by his folly ; why will you not treat such childish violence as it deserves, and leave it to its own insignificance ?”

“ Let me but teach him a little civility, and I will then leave him to your moderation.”

“ Would you then commence open war against this misguided young man ?”

“ No, Paolo, he will, I believe, save me the trouble ; why, if you were not known for the bravest of the brave, I should suspect you loved not danger, so warmly do you plead for peace.”

“ I had almost rather be branded for a coward, than involve Sciacca in a new feud of Luna and Perollo,” said Paolo, as they entered the gates of the Casa di Perollo.

Count Sigismund preserved the strictest silence during the whole of his journey to Bivonia, as if brooding over the vengeance

he had threatened, and unwilling to allow any cause whatever to divert his mind from the one great end he had in view, the destruction of Perollo.

On arriving at his castle, he heeded not the attentions of those about him, refused all refreshment, and, offering a slight excuse to Marco Luchese, retired to a private apartment, where he passed the whole night in writing to all the connexions of his house, to his own personal friends, and to every one over whom he possessed either influence or power, requiring them to join him instantly at Bivonia, for the purpose of consulting upon business of the utmost importance, and to bring with them all their vassals and retainers; and by daybreak messengers were sent off in all directions with his letters.

Within the castle all was bustle and preparation for the reception of the expected guests, and Sigismund, in the hurry and tumult of external objects, and the full employment of his time and thoughts, endeavoured to find some respite from the

conflicting passions which agitated his mind.

In the first burst of fury at the insult he had received, every other idea had been overpowered; Costanza even had been forgotten; and when the remembrance of his love returned, it came mingled with the recollection of the various incidents in which his enemies had crossed him.

The affair of Serican had given a bias to the mind of Solanto in favour of Perollo. The services of Federico had previously made an impression on the mind of Costanza, which had been improved by circumstances; whilst untoward accidents had shewn forth his own temper in its most unprepossessing form. The intimacy of the baroness Pandolfina with the mother of his intended bride, and the interference of Paolo Perollo, all tended to confirm his jealousy, and to impel him forwards in seeking the destruction of his foes.

Anxiously he awaited the arrival of his friends, more particularly that of Adriano, on whom he depended to devise some

plan by which his marriage with Costanza might be secured.

The summons of their chieftain was obeyed with alacrity by all the adherents of his house. In the course of a few days, a numerous band of nobles and their retainers were assembled at Bivonia; amongst whom were Pietro Gilberto, a Palermitan cavalier, and Michele Pugiades, a newly-declared enemy of Perollo.

All the men of Bivonia, and the surrounding country, and from every part of the domains of count Luna, were collected with the greatest expedition. Accursi d'Amato obeyed the call, and brought with him the Greek count Giorgio, who was immediately engaged as a stipendiary with many of his countrymen and followers, men of evil life, and despisers of every danger. Of these Greeks there were at that time considerable numbers scattered over the island, and distinguished for acts of cruelty and revenge.

Having assembled nearly four hundred men, don Sigismund communicated to the

chiefs the purpose he had in hand ; and, finding them all zealous in his cause, selected those on whose judgment he could best rely to advise with on the conduct of his designs.

To them count Luna painted his grievances, with all the aggravation which long-cherished hatred, jealousy, and a sense of recent injury and insult, could give ; and pleaded, with all the animation these incitements must necessarily inspire, and at the same time pleaded to an audience instigated by similar feelings, and whose swords were always ready to start from their scabbards at the command of their chieftains. One heart and one mind appeared to animate the whole body, and with enthusiasm they entered into his measures.

The dark visage of Accursi d'Amato was rendered more terrific by his smile of anticipated vengeance ; and perhaps, for the first time, the countenance of Adriano exhibited the real feelings of his heart, as, with a look of triumphant malignity, he

surveyed the powers assembled to crush the objects of his bitterest hatred and detestation.

To decide upon the surest method of attaining their end, was a work of time, and called forth all their energies. Powerful as they were in numbers, Adriano pointed out the hopeless chance of open warfare, which don Sigismund impetuously demanded, in a city populous as Sciacca, with the multitude in favour of their enemy, many of the principal inhabitants not to be depended upon, and others decidedly friendly to Perollo.

"It would," urged Adriano, "be an act of madness to attack the castle of don Giacomo," the wall and towers of which had been so lately strengthened and repaired; they had the command of no artillery, whilst Perollo had seven pieces of considerable weight, his walls were well manned, his armoury well furnished, and he himself, with all his crimes and tyranny, had ever borne the reputation of a wise and brave commander. Nor were the strength and talents of his kinsmen and

adherents to be forgotten and despised. By advancing openly, and with banners displayed, it would appear as if they were risen in declared rebellion against the emperor himself, and thus excite the country in general against them, and place their lives and property in jeopardy hereafter.

"And what then are the temporizing plans of Geronimo Peralta?" asked Della Bardia, with a look of contempt; "by what crooked paths of policy does he intend to lead us on to victory and vengeance? Is a force of four hundred gallant men to be wasted in devising schemes of individual assassination? Count Luna, you have now the united powers of your friends and family obedient to your command; with one heart they have vowed to redress your wrongs—with one voice they call for the total extermination of our mutual enemies; and if but one individual of Perollo's accursed race shall escape, this tyranny will hereafter be again revived, and our posterity will crouch beneath the

yoke from which we may deliver them. Let us draw our toils around their den, nor let one thought of mercy be permitted to any soul connected with Perollo."

"No one," said Calogero Calandrino, "can, I think, accuse me of supporting plans of needless caution, or of charity towards the party of Perollo; but I must think, with the baron Adriano, that our forces are too weak to cope with the undivided power of don Giacomo; if he can himself be surprised and slain, the residue would fall an easy conquest. Let then a number of our men be selected for his destruction—let them be received and secretly kept in Sciacca, till an occasion offers when they may rush out and crush the insolent oppressor, surround his walls, admit into the city the remainder of our troops, and finally complete our glorious triumph of revenge and justice."

The opinion of Calandrino met with almost universal approbation. Sigismund and Della Bardia at length acceded to it, and the assembly proceeded to deliberate

on the surest way of putting their designs in practice. Finally it was determined to select an hundred of their boldest men, who were to be conveyed into the city during the night, and await an opportunity when Perollo should leave his castle; and, by a sudden assault, they then hoped to compass his destruction, after which they might proceed as circumstances should dictate. The first difficulty to be surmounted was the conveying so large a body of persons into the town unnoticed. The gates being regularly closed at night, made this more difficult; but it was at length proposed that they should enter by means of a lower window in the house of Pietro Infontanetta, which, as adjoining the exterior wall of the city, in a situation little exposed to public notice, could afford the surest and most private ingress to any number of men, and at any hour of the night.

The impatience of don Sigismund urged the immediate execution of their enter-

prise; but Adriano, Pugiades, and one or two of the more cautious leaders, demanded a few hours preparation and reflection, that every thing might be better arranged and considered, and no oversight destroy their hopes at the time of action. The delay was not obtained without much debate and opposition from the more impetuous members of the confederacy, and only upon an assurance that the scheme should be put in practice on the second night.

As the party separated, Sigismund took an opportunity to desire Adriano privately to follow him to his own apartment, as soon as he could escape from general observation.

A long interview took place between the count and his confidential friend, which continued during great part of the night; and at daybreak Adriano left the castle, attended by ten of his followers; and to all inquiries after him the next day, Sigismund replied, that the baron, having some affairs of importance to transact, had de-

parted for a few hours, but would probably return to partake in the expedition on the ensuing night.

During the morning after this secret journey of Peralta, Sigismund encountered Della Bardia on the ramparts of the castle; and entering into conversation with him on the subject of their approaching enterprise, observed, that it did not appear that many of their party concurred with him in considering it of consequence to destroy other of their enemies besides Pandolfina himself—"Yet," added Luna, "I feel as deeply injured by the treachery of the son, in endeavouring to alienate the affections of my betrothed wife, as by the insults of the father, or the impertinent interference and unfounded accusation of their kinsman don Paolo, who pretends to have had information of the existence of some female connexion of mine, which may be an obstacle to my intended alliance."

"Indeed!" said Della Bardia, looking surprised. "To whom could he allude?"

Sigismund fixed his eyes steadily on Accursi—"Can it be possible that my suspicions are well founded," he said, "and that my mother's mysterious allusion had any foundation?"

"If your excellenza derived any knowledge from the countess Caltabellotta, it is probably correct," coldly replied Della Bardia.

"My mother hinted at some transaction in which you yourself were concerned, signor."

"Speak out, count Sigismund di Luna; I am prepared to meet your questions, nor shall I refuse to answer them."

"Your vehemence, Della Bardia, has rendered you forgetful where you are. If you have any information to communicate, let us retire to a more private spot; we are here exposed to all the vassals who crowd the courts below."

"It matters not," answered Accursi; "it will not long be a secret that Francisca di Luna is restored again, and claims her natural rights."

"I know not," said Sigismund, "who this same lady is; but be she who she may, we need not subject her history or her claims to the discussion of our vassals; nor can I easily forgive those who pretend to be my friends, and have exposed me to the suspicions of the baron Solanto, the insinuations of Paolo Perollo, and to the appearance of having acted with dishonour and duplicity. Let us retire, and in a more convenient place inform me of the particulars of this mysterious affair."

"There is no occasion for retirement, don Sigismund; the bride of Della Bardia, and the sister of count Luna, has been too long concealed from the knowledge of the world."

Sigismund stood in mute amazement—"You must have been imposed upon, barone della Bardia; my father had no child but me, save one who died in infancy."

"Your excellenza has been misinformed. The baroness della Bardia was report-

ed dead, and since that time resided with the nuns of Santa Caterina."

"My mother's evidence will soon confute this foolish history," observed don Sigismund:

"The countess dares not, cannot, does not, disown her daughter, the lady Francisca di Luna," said Accursi.

Again don Sigismund paused.—"Should this improbable tale," he said at last, "be true, who has dared to give a daughter of our house in marriage without the consent of her high relatives?"

"The countess Castabellotta has found no unfit husband for her child, I trust, in her kinsman Accursi d'Amato; and be she finally acknowledged or not by her nearer connexions, we have evidence sufficient to compel them not to withhold her rights."

"Do you threaten me with this impetuosity, signor? Have you yet to learn that Luna is not to be acted upon by insolence or terror?"

"Neither has arrogance, or affected in-

credulity, yet influenced Della Bardia. I have no desire, don Sigismund, to expose your mother's deeds of unnatural cruelty towards her helpless child, nor to be at variance with yourself; it was not my intention to have made this disclosure until after your nuptials with Solanto's daughter; your own curiosity has drawn it from me, and with yourself it remains to make it public, or still to conceal it till that event has taken place; until when, I am willing to allow our claims to continue dormant."

"I wish, signor d'Amato, to take no undue advantage of the baron Solanto, and to shew the world, that Sigismund di Luna is clear from the imputation cast upon him; but whilst the present important affair is pending, it will be impossible for me to attend to any other. As soon as leisure is afforded me, I shall be happy to investigate the lady's claims; and if substantiated, gladly receive her as my sister. Had this information come in any other manner, or through any other chan-

nel than a Perollo, I should have welcomed it more cheerfully ; but I cannot now deny the justice of their accusation, and may find it difficult to clear myself from the suspicion of being accessory to the concealment."

"Your excellenza can arrange that as best pleases you," said Accursi ; "it will be a matter of little import when you have secured the lady and her dower."

Don Sigismund was going to reply, not in the gentlest manner, to this cavalier mode of treating his character ; but Della Bardia interrupted him, by requesting permission to bring a prisoner to Bivonia, whose life and safety, he said, were of material consequence to him ; and as during the approaching hostilities he should be absent from his own castle, his captive would be more secure at Bivonia, where a garrison was always kept, than elsewhere. The count gave the permission, without troubling himself to make any inquiries, and left his companion to himself.

A few days after the scene of alterca-

tion between don Sigismund and Perollo at the cassino, the family of Solanto were thrown into astonishment by the arrival of the countess Caltabellotta, attired in a state dress, which she had worn fifty years before at Palermo, attended by her awkward domestics, and endeavouring to imitate the elegance and splendour of the baroness Pandolfina. Her arrival was announced some minutes before she made her entrance, and she appeared to be studying the means of making her dignity most conspicuous. She was received with easy and respectful attention by the baroness, and with reserve by Costanza.

"Count Luna," the lady began, "has commissioned me to offer his excuses to the signora di Solanto for his involuntary absence. Unexpected business has called him over to Bivonia, which may detain him there for several days."

Costanza bowed, but expressed no regret at his absence; her mother however endeavoured, by every means in her power, to conciliate her guest, but apparently in

vain : the coolness with which the younger lady received herself and her intelligence, produced a cloud of ill-humour, which nothing seemed likely to dissipate. With the delivery of her embassy, the conversation of the countess was exhausted ; but she considered it as a matter of etiquette to make her visit of a certain length. After some time she again addressed Costanza — “ Upon the return of don Sigismund to Sciacca,” she said, “ some time will, I suppose, be fixed for the fulfilment of your engagement, signora ? ”

“ My destiny, madam,” replied Costanza, “ is, in this instance, in my father’s hands ; count Luna’s violence is little likely to make me anxious for any such period.”

“ There are few young females, signora, in Sicily,” said the elder lady, “ who would not appreciate the merits of my son, and the honour of his alliance, at a sufficiently-high rate to overlook any little effusions of vehemence which his warm and generous temper sometimes involves him in.”

“ The Sicilian damsels, and particularly

those in Sciacca, possess, I doubt not, all the meekness and patience of their mothers," said Costanza; "but I am unfortunately not gifted with the gentle spirit of the baroness Solanto."

The countess shewed symptoms of anger and impatience; but repressing them, answered—"Sigismund's love, signora, is ardent and impetuous; but your influence over him, in every instance, will shew itself, when all causes for jealousy and fear are at an end."

"Your excellenza is arguing," replied Costanza, "as if every impediment to this union were obviated; whereas the conduct of count Luna, during the last interview with which he honoured our family, was such as would have made me refuse him even at the altar; and I beg once again to state, that I consider myself as under no obligation to fulfil the treaty which was begun before our arrival here; and that I should expect my future days to pass more peaceably in any way, than as

united with the head of a faction, so violent as that with which count Luna is connected."

"It is well the baron Solanto possesses an authority over this high spirit, lady."

"In that I perfectly agree with your excellenza," answered Costanza; "and so gently does he use it, that I should be unwilling to exchange it, were the dispositions of my future connexions more inviting, and had no other lady claims upon don Sigismund."

"I am ignorant of your allusion, signora," said the countess, looking pale.

The baroness prevented her daughter's reply, by mentioning that she had heard some mysterious history, which, she doubted not, count Luna would easily explain when next they met.

"Some malignant invention of Perollo, I presume."

"Don Paolo Perollo," interrupted Costanza, "has never been accused, by envy itself, of falsehood or malignity."

"The detested race are all alike," said the lady, furiously, as the countess Sambuca entered the room.

Without perceiving all the party present, with a silent salutation to the baroness, she rushed up to Costanza, and embraced her, with every symptom of the most violent affection—"My dear creature!" said she, "allow me to congratulate you on your delightful escape! I have been enchanted ever since I heard this exquisite story; it is, to be sure, very dreadful; but you must be most happy at its termination."

"Allow me to introduce you to the countess Caltabellotta," replied Costanza.

The lady looked round surprised; and seeing the countess, was silent for a few moments. The mother of Sigismund, however, affected not to perceive the intruder, who resumed her conversation in an under-tone.

"I was in hopes, my dear friend," she said, "of not finding any of your old lover's family at the casino, and of hear-

ing more of this divine history. I wish I durst speak to that old wretch, and ask her a few questions. She looks dreadfully grim; but I cannot restrain my curiosity;" and, in rather a faltering tone, the countess Sambuca began—"You really must excuse me, my dear madam, but I am so interested in the affair, that I cannot help applying to you for information.—Will you tell me some of the dreadful particulars?"

The countess Caltabellotta, between anger and surprise, was perfectly mute; and the inquirer, taking her silence as permission to proceed, continued—"It certainly must be a very unpleasant circumstance to your family, signora; but as it is now so generally known, and all the facts so clearly established, there can be no longer any use in secrecy. When Laura Benfari first told me that the lady Lucretia was alive again, I assure you I said directly—"Madama di Trapani! What a horror for the poor countess Caltabellotta!" But really, when I heard that she had lived privately

all this time with that fright the barone della Hardie, I was so shocked at her conduct, that I even pitied her husband. I do abhor scandal, and think it the most dreadful thing in the world; but when one hears of such interesting events, one cannot help listening. I dare say don Sigismund wont be able to get a divorce, for the pope will not like to expose his niece; so my dear superior-minded Costanza will be free, and marry my cousin Federico, as I told signor Pignatelli when we first met."

The baroness had been so astonished at the beginning of this harangue, that she had lost her presence of mind, and had not attempted to interrupt it; but both Costanza and herself becoming alarmed at the consequences, exerted themselves by protesting against the absurdity of her information; Costanza blushed deeply at the mention of Federico, and the allusion to the conversation at the Casa di Perollo.

"Pray, ladies," said the countess Calta-

bellotta, pale with rage, "let this candid and most amusing personage proceed; she may elucidate several mysteries with which we are unacquainted. Probably," she continued, "the signora di Sambuca is an emissary from this honourable lover; let me be no interruption to your proceedings, madame; I am about to depart; but first, you must let me express my thanks for your avowal of the connexion between this lady and Perollo."

"I declare I had no idea she was so agreeable," said the countess Sambuca; "I had always been told she was the most——"

"I must request, signora," said Costanza, "that you will, for my sake, explain the subject which the countess Caltabellotta appears to misunderstand."

"Really, my dear creature, I cannot explain it," she answered. "You know it has been reported that the lady Lucretia was spirited away," with a significant nod at the countess.

"Silence, fool!" exclaimed the lady, shaking with emotion.

The countess Sambuca screamed at the vehemence of her tone and gesture.

"I must desire," said Costanza, gravely, and with firmness, "that the signora be allowed to explain her insinuation about signor Perollo."

Poor madame Sambuca was, however, terrified into silence, and seemed only anxious how to escape from the presence of the enraged countess Caltabellotta.

"Nothing more is necessary on the subject," said the latter; "every one will now be convinced of the treachery with which don Sigismund has been treated."

The baroness Solanto pointed out the justice of hearing her daughter's explanation.

"The first time," said Costanza, "I met this lady at the Casa di Perollo, she certainly expressed a wish that my engagement with count Luna could be transferred to her kinsman; but it was said, I then considered, in the same unthinking way in which she has now repeated it. This, signora di Sambuca, is, I believe,

the true history of all your conversation on the subject."

"Really, my dear creature, I dare say it is; but pray take me away from that dreadful person; I am so terrified, I shall not be able to speak for a month."

"Your account, signora di Solanto," said the countess Caltabellotta, "has unfortunately so many circumstances to contradict it, that it can scarcely be believed."

"When I condescended to explain the thoughtless expressions of this lady," said Costanza, with calm dignity, "it was done to vindicate my own conduct, and to inform my mother of their meaning. I weigh too lightly the opinion of your excellenza, to have entered into any explanation on your account."

"What a delightful spirit!" whispered the countess Sambuca to the baroness; "I would not speak again to the cross old creature for the universe."

"I must request, signora, that you will have the goodness to confirm or contradict the statement of Costanza."

"My dear madam," she replied, still in an under-tone, "I never contradict any body but my husband; I would not, I am sure, oppose that lady, though what donna Costanza says is perfectly true."

"Be so good, countess Caltabellotta, "as to hear this lady's acknowledgment," said the baroness.

"Addio," said the signora di Sambuca, making to the door.

The commands and entreaties of Costanza and her mother were in vain; she hastily withdrew, and the mother of count Luna looked with a sarcastic smile to the parties remaining.

"My assertions want not further proof with you, my mother, I trust," said Costanza.

"No, my child; nor will they with any who knows and can appreciate you as you deserve."

"Your friend, signora," said the countess, "seemed unwilling to confirm the statement you vouchsafed to give; don

Sigismund will have no small right to demand a more explicit satisfaction."

"Don Sigismund can have no right over my conduct, madame. The accusation under which he himself now lies, is such as demands the fullest explanation. If my father has been insulted by the offer of an engagement, to which any secret impediment existed, he may indeed complain of treachery and dishonourable usage. But I wish not to recriminate, and again repeat, that I consider my engagement to your son, count Luna, as null and void."

"That you may fulfil your contract with Perollo," said the countess; "but beware, young lady; you may raise a storm which shall crush your house, as well as theirs. The friends of Luna are numerous and brave; force may revenge his injuries, but not redress them."

"The threats and promises of don Sigismund, his friends, and family, I equally disregard," said Costanza.

Solanto now entered the apartment, and good-humouredly saluted the countess.

"You heard, I hope, the last reply of donna Costanza," she said; "though without perhaps fully understanding the impulse under which she acts, her engagements with Perollo are now exposed beyond a doubt."

"Engagements with Perollo!" repeated Solanto; "to whose engagements does your *eccellenza* allude?"

"To those of your daughter, signor, the betrothed bride of Sigismund count Luna. We shall now see how far you have been infected by their schemes."

"If we have any arrangements with the baron Pandolfina," replied Solanto, "there would be some treachery perhaps in breaking them; but what treaty can Costanza have entered into, to excite such vehemence in your *eccellenza*?"

"It appears hardly possible," said the countess, "that you, baron Solanto, should be ignorant of the love entertained by Federico Perollo for your daughter, though she may have denied the return she has

dared to make to his presumptuous passion."

"And who has now discovered this most important secret?" asked the gentleman.

"Her friend the countess Sambuca."

"Costanza has been most imprudent in her choice of a *confidante*," said Solanto, smiling.

"And you intend, signor, to justify her falsehood?"

"By no means, signora; I only intend to doubt the authenticity of your information."

"And dare you doubt the word of the countess Caltabellotta?" asked the lady, in no gentle tone.

"I may be allowed, I hope, to doubt the authority on which your excellenza's opinion is formed."

The composure of the baron provoked the lady beyond endurance—"Once for all, baron Solanto," she said, "as the mother of count Luna, I demand to know

your determination—whether you intend to fulfil your contract with my son, or, in defiance of honour and justice, give your daughter to Perollo?”

“Probably neither,” said Solanto, with indifference. “I should be sorry to displease you, lady, or treat count Luna improperly; but I see too much against the intended union at present to allow it to proceed, though this denial by no means involves a future contract with Perollo, or a final rejection of count Luna’s suit.”

“This then, sir, is your decision?”

“For the present, signora, this is my resolution.”

“Then, baron Solanto, on your own head be the fatal consequences,” replied the lady, and rose to depart.

The baroness received a slight parting salutation; but Costanza was regarded only with a look of indignation.

“Allow me to see your excellenza to your litter,” said Solanto, as the lady was quitting the room.

“My attendants are in waiting,” answered the countess; and refusing his offered hand, departed.

CHAPTER IV.
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So that, from point to point, now have you heard  
The fundamental reasons of this war,  
Whose great decision bath much blood let forth,  
And more thirsts after.     *All's Well that Ends Well.*

THE hot springs of Sciacca are situated in a deep and rocky valley, at the distance of about half a league from the city, and have been the resort of invalids from time immemorial. The waters are powerfully impregnated with sulphur, and rise at a very high temperature, and of the colour of milk ; so great is the quantity of the mineral contained in them, that the pipes through which they flow into the baths become choked up from the deposit ; and by evaporating, the fluid, after it has passed through the places designed for the bathers, a vast quantity of sulphur is obtained.

offered to accompany her. The latter, though in low spirits, was calm and composed; and her young friend sought every means of beguiling her sorrows in detailing the event which had so unfortunately affected her mother.

Costanza said, she could easily have forgiven the attack upon herself, after the irritation of the moment was over, for the sake of the effect which the fury of the countess had produced upon her father's mind, it having almost determined him to give up all thoughts of a union for her with don Sigismund, to whom she now felt so decided a dislike, as to make her rejoice in any event which broke their engagement, without involving her in disobedience to her parents; "for the sagacity of my unfortunate friend, the countess Sambuca," she continued, "her absurd terror of the old lady, and provoking repetition of her own ridiculous conversation, they would have afforded me so much amusement in the recollection, that I should have felt obliged to her for the

scene, had it not involved my mother's present illness. The arrival of the baroness Pandolfina will, I hope, revive her; and my father has all along endeavoured to place the intemperate violence of the countess in as absurd a light as possible."

The ladies wandered for some time beneath the olive and almond trees around the house, and at length seated themselves on a fragment of rock, at some distance from it, sheltered on all sides from the beams of the sun, and embosomed amongst the shrubs, which grew luxuriantly above. Marguerita was unable to support the conversation; and Costanza, fearful of fatiguing her, was silent also. The hum of the insects fluttering in the air was the only sound which disturbed the repose of the scene; and the ladies had sat for several minutes, when a loud yawn, as if from a person awaking from sleep, startled them to attention.

"A pretty watch you keep!" said a hoarse gruff voice on the other side of the rock on which they were resting.

"Watch!" replied some other person, "after riding all night; not for count Luna himself, much less for this good friend of his."

Costanza looked at her companion in speechless amazement, and Marguerita appeared equally terrified.

The first speaker began again—"We shall have a troublesome job, I expect, and our chieftain seems to think so too, for he keeps himself pretty well out of the way."

"This carrying off," said the second voice, "is poor work, and gives a deal of useless trouble—a stiletto would do the business in half the time. Our leader has commanded us to be tender over them, but I am inclined to think he was not much in earnest, and would have little objection to our making short work of it, and giving his prisoner over into the keeping of a good deep grave."

A dark ruffian-like face appeared amidst the bushes, and the terrified females fled with the utmost speed towards the house, where they arrived breathless from alarm.

Costanza had the presence of mind to prevent her companion from disturbing her mother or the baroness Pandolfina, and eagerly inquired for her father. The baron, she was told, had left the house soon after the young ladies, and was not yet returned. The amusement she had derived from the society of her friend was of considerable service to the baroness Solanto, who entreated her to repeat her kindness soon.

After their departure, Costanza impatiently awaited the return of her father, that she might detail to him the conversation she had heard in the grove; but she looked for him in vain; and as evening approached, her terrors rapidly increased. She inquired if the baron had gone to visit don Giacomo? The baron Pandolfina, her mother said, was so occupied with business of importance, as to be prevented from leaving his castle, even for an hour. After which information, communicated by the baroness, it was not probable that Solanto had gone thither.

The distress of Costanza became every moment more insupportable; and her mother also began to be impatient for the return of her husband, when a noise of horsemen was heard, and soon after count Luna was announced. Costanza, who at any other time would have met him with repulsive coolness, now welcomed his arrival, as a possible means of being relieved from her uneasiness, and from the idea of having some one to whom she could communicate her fears.

"I am come over from Bivonia only for an hour," he said, "but would not lose the opportunity of paying my respects here, and of inquiring after the health of the baroness Solanto and yourself, lady Costanza."

"My mother is, I trust, improving," she replied, "but unable to bear the fatigue of much conversation; and my father is at present absent from the cassino; but I hope and expect each moment to see him return."

Encouraged by his favourable reception,

don Sigismund attempted to converse on indifferent subjects, but his manner was constrained, and he seemed ill at ease.

Under the pretence of not disturbing her mother, Costanza attracted the count to a distant window, and requested a few minutes private conversation with him. Luna appeared confounded at the request, and as if he knew not how to proceed.—“Take leave,” said Costanza, “and withdraw, and I will join you immediately in another apartment.”

Her anxiety appeared excessive, and Sigismund could not but obey. He excused the shortness of his visit on account of the necessity of his return to Bivonia; and taking leave of the baroness and Costanza, begged his respectful salutations to the baron, and retired.

In a few minutes the signora di Solanto found some excuse to follow him.

In relating the conversation she had heard in the grove, and the subsequent absence of her father, Costanza was so overpowered by agitation and distress, that it

was some time before she observed the extraordinary conduct of don Sigismund; but having related all she knew, and detailed her fears that some misfortune had befallen her parent, she requested the advice and assistance of Luna, and waited his reply. As she looked earnestly in his face through her tears, don Sigismund averted his eyes with precipitation, and stammered forth an unintelligible attempt to console and support her spirits, without any comment on what he had heard, or proposing any immediate plan of proceeding.

“It is not consolation,” said Costanza, “that I am now in need of, but advice and active exertion. The ruffian I overheard in the grove mentioned your name, count Luna, and some friend of yours.” Sigismund trembled beneath her look, blushed, and was about to defend himself. “I am not going to accuse you, count Luna, of any connexion with those persons, neither am I aware that my father can have excited any enmity amongst the

people of the country, but, by what I heard, I am assured that they are known to some of your friends ; and if any dreadful design has been perpetrated against my father, to you I look for redress."

Luna assured her of every exertion in his power being made to discover the cause of the baron's mysterious absence—" But it is now early evening," he said, " and your alarms are perhaps visionary."

" Oh no, no," replied Costanza ; " every moment confirms the dreadful suspicions which the scene to-day gave rise to ; I foresee the certain death of my mother in the shock this horrible event will give her, if any accident has befallen my father." She shuddered at her thoughts.

Luna again attempted some commonplace topic of consolation, but proposed no remedy for her distressing anxiety. Costanza again looked steadily in his face. He appeared anxious to avoid her inquiring gaze, and to be confused and uneasy at it. She started, and suddenly left the

apartment. Luna waited for her, and she came not, and he was impatiently pacing the room, when he heard a horse pass rapidly under the window. He summoned a domestic, and requested that the lady Costanza might be informed that he awaited her further commands.

"The signora desired me to say," answered the man, "should your excellenza inquire for her, that she has no further wish to detain you."

"Is the baron Solanto returned?" asked Luna.

"No, signor."

"What horseman just left the casino?"

"Perhaps one of your excellenza's train."

Sigismund stood some time in silent deliberation with himself; the servant waited as if to conduct him out.—"I must see the lady Costanza again."

"It is impossible, signor; she is now with the baroness, and desired me peremptorily to tell your excellenza she had no further commands."

With hesitating step, Luna departed, and inquired impatiently if any of his suite had left the casino during his stay.

"Your excellenza gave no such orders," said one of the men. "A horseman passed us some time since, but whence he came I know not."

The count, in the hearing of Solanto's attendants, now ordered his party to Bivonia.

The extraordinary discomposure of count Luna, and his conduct altogether, had excited in Costanza a suspicion of some foul deed with which he was at least acquainted; and instantly quitting him, she dispatched a trusty messenger to don Giacomo Perollo, stating her fears that some conspiracy was on foot against her father and his family, and entreating his immediate presence and protection, she desired the messenger to use his utmost speed, and that no one might inform count Luna of her proceedings.

After this she returned to her mother, who was getting anxious and uneasy to a

most painful degree. Costanza felt unable to excite hopes to which she herself was a stranger, yet to disclose the whole of her fears she dared not. At length she informed her, that she had dispatched a message to Perollo Castle, to inform the baron Pandolfina of her father's absence, and to request his presence and advice. This step met with the decided approbation of the baroness, but as it shewed the strength of Costanza's fears, contributed to increase her own. She however thought it too early in the evening to excite any great alarm.

Every passing sound caught the attention of the mother and daughter. Costanza had closed the lattice, lest the night air should inconvenience the invalid ; but she herself wandered every minute to the antiroom, to listen from the balcony. She had dismissed servants with torches, in various directions, to search the thickets ; but one by one they returned as the time wore away, without any tidings of their lord. She had counted the time also which it might take to bring Perollo, and thought

he also was delayed beyond all expectation. At length a distant sound caught her ears; she again hurried to the balcony, and listened with breathless anxiety. A loud trampling of horses sounded from the craggy road to Sciacca—"It is only don Giacomo," she said, and a fearful weight pressed heavily on her heart. The party approached with rapidity, and seemed more numerous than she had expected. A few minutes brought them to the cassino. Costanza ran to meet them, and, with something like disappointment, saw don Paolo Perollo, attended by Gaetano—"My father!" she exclaimed, in a hurried tone. The countenances of the gentlemen exhibited no cheering signs of intelligence.

"I regret most sincerely, lady," said don Paolo, "this distressing event. For the ultimate safety of the baron Solanto, I trust you need feel no alarm; but I fear the machinations of our enemies and his have succeeded in securing his person. I have directed a body of our men to search every road and passage in the neighbour-

hood, and to use every means to discover tidings of your father. In the meantime the safety of your mother and yourself can only be ensured by your immediate removal to the Casa di Perollo; imperious circumstances detained my kinsman, don Giacomo, from hastening to your assistance; but he has sent signor Pignatelli and myself to conduct you thither. A litter will arrive instantly, and it will be right to lose no time in apprising the baroness of the necessity of putting the plan in execution instantly."

Costanza stood for some time speechless with horror and astonishment; thus to have her fears confirmed, no hopes given, and dangers still unknown, which made all these precautions necessary, was more than her mind could comprehend at first. The idea of her father's ultimate safety, which don Paolo frequently repeated, and the necessity of supporting her mother, obliged her to rally her spirits, and with some composure she conducted the gentlemen to her.

Perollo endeavoured to make the affair as light as possible to the baroness—"Pardolina and his friends," he said, "signora, have no doubt of the source from whence your distress arises. Some petty malice of the countess Caltabellotta, Adriano, or some of the partisans of Luna, who are busily engaged, we learn, in planning some offensive operations against don Giacomo, has induced them to decoy the baron Solanto into their society, to endeavour to make him espouse their party; they will soon find their weakness and error, and release him. But to counteract their schemes, we all think it necessary that your excellenza and the lady Costanza should be conveyed in safety to the Casa di Perollo. I have assured the signora di Solanto, and here repeat, that I do not apprehend any personal danger to the baron; but during his detention, which may be prolonged a few days, you will be more secure from insult in my kinsman's castle than here. Our suppositions may still be wrong, and I have dispatched men in

every direction to search for your lord. Should they be so fortunate as to recover him, they have orders to escort him to Sciacca; and Pandolfina has sent a litter for yourself and daughter, to be conveyed to his protection, should you so please."

"Count Sigismund himself was here this evening," said Costanza. "I did not wish to distress you, my mother, by my fears, but in a private interview with him after he quitted you, I saw such signs of confusion in his conduct, as excited my suspicions; other circumstances, I suppose, don Paolo, you have heard," she added, alluding to the conversation which Marguerita had been witness to, but which she so trembled to reflect upon, that she would not alarm her mother by the detail.

Perollo understood her, and replied, that he had collected other information, which strongly proved that no fears were to be entertained for the safety of the baron, but that they could gain nothing at present to direct their search.

The baroness was so shocked by the intelligence, even softened as it was by the care of her friends, that she remained, during this conversation, gazing in silent terror on those around her, and at last fainted on the bosom of her daughter. Their exertions restored her in a short time to animation, but it was only by her looks she could assent to the wishes of the party for her removal.

The ladies and their female attendants were immediately conducted by Perollo from the cassino, and escorted by a numerous body of well-armed men, whom don Giacomo had sent.

The party set out for the Casa di Perollo, leaving the male domestics in the house, with strict orders to forward any information which could be gained, without loss of time, to the baron Pandolfina.

They arrived at the castle gate without the walls, which was immediately opened, and both don Giacomo and the baroness were waiting to receive their unhappy

guests, with every attention which circumstances would allow.

The wife of Solanto was, however, nearly in a state of insensibility, and appeared scarcely to perceive the kindness of her friends. She was immediately carried to a private apartment, and her hostess then begged Costanza to leave her mother for a short time to her care; whilst she informed don Giacomo of every particular she had been able to make out relative to this unfortunate affair. The conversation she had heard in the grove; the circumstances of her interview with don Sigismund; and the vague threats of the countess Caltabellotta, were the only grounds for suspicion she could furnish; but Pandolfina appeared to have other corroborating circumstances, which weighed upon his mind, to fix the absence of her father on some of the Luna party—"I am, however," he added, "decidedly of don Paolo's opinion, that there is no danger of their offering any violence to their pri-

soner; and I have no doubt but a very few days at furthest will enable me to discover more, and to effect the release of the baron, for which purpose I will exert every means that can be devised; and should there be any particular line of proceeding which will relieve the anxiety of your mother and yourself, more than the course I intend to pursue, I will, with readiness and pleasure, adopt it."

An appeal to the feelings of count Luna Costanza felt would be in vain, and to call for the aid of the viceroy would take too much time; yet still she wished that both these measures should be resorted to directly.

"I will instantly dispatch a courier to Palermo," replied Pandolfina; "but by expressing our decided suspicion of Luna, we shall put him on his guard against our more private inquiries: still it shall be as you wish, signora."

Costanza left the whole affair in the hands of her friends, assuring them that she relied most confidently on their zeal and

wisdom in the cause, and then returned to her mother, who was in a slight degree recovered, the judicious conversation of her friend having revived her hopes, and somewhat cheered her spirits.

Tediously the hours of night wore away, and morning brought no intelligence of the baron.

During the scene of distress which the preceding evening had witnessed, Federico Perollo had not been an uninterested spectator; he had earnestly entreated to be one of the party to the cassino, or at least to be permitted to go in search of Solanto, and it was only the representations of his mother which restrained him. She anxiously pointed out the impropriety of his interfering, after the jealousy of don Sigismund had been so publicly shewn towards him — “The assertions of the countess had attempted to accuse Costanza and himself of dishonourable proceedings, and the baroness Solanto had remonstrated against any particular attentions. For the sake of the signora di Solanto you ought

not to take any part in the proceedings, my son ; all that can be done will be effected by your father, don Paolo, and Pignatelli ; and as your exertions could not be of signal benefit, the characters, both of the lady and yourself, require you to avoid any public display of the interest you take in her and her family."

Unwillingly Federico consented ; and though he deplored the sufferings of the mother and daughter, yet he could not avoid contemplating, with no little satisfaction, the circumstance of their being inmates in his father's house, and the certainty of Costanza's engagements with count Luna being, from henceforth, entirely at an end.

During the whole of the day on which the destined expedition was to leave Bivonia, the castle of don Sigismund was a scene of bustle and confusion ; the count himself, with all the principal leaders, were to be of the party to Sciacca, and had selected an hundred of their most daring fol-

lowers. Adriano was not returned, but was expected to join them soon after their arrival in the city. It was arranged that Sigismund should go over early in the evening, and that Accursi d'Amato should remain to superintend the conveyance of the troops.

The count departed in the afternoon, with only the small train of his usual domestics, and after a short interview with his mother, on arriving at Luna Castle, rode down to the Solanto cassino, giving it out as his intention to return to Bivonia for some time longer. After his dismissal, therefore, by Costanza, he had given directions to his followers to take the road thither; but as soon as he had got a short distance, he turned his horse, and rode back to the city with his party.

Three hours after sunset the enemies of Perello started on their murderous expedition, in small companies of four or six each, and at short intervals of time, being strictly enjoined to avoid the principal road as much as possible, and to proceed with

all the silence and secrecy they could. Pietro Infontanetta himself went with the first party, to guide them to the window in his house by which they were to effect their unobserved entrance into the city.

The night was dark, and veiled their purpose to the utmost of their wishes; the first party, without meeting with any incident or interruption, reached the walls of Seiacca, and skirted the city at some short distance, till they arrived opposite the Casa d'Infontanetta, as any thing like preparation might have excited suspicion. The party were obliged to break away the bars of the window, and remove some of the stone-work, before they could effect their entrance. This, however, was done without creating any alarm, and they gained the interior unperceived by any but the members of the conspiracy, and immediately proceeded to Luna Castle, to await the coming of their companions. Party after party continued to arrive during the greater part of the night.

One of the companies, under Calogero Calandrino, in proceeding along the walls of the city, perceived at some distance rather a numerous band of persons with torches surrounding a litter; and immediately ordering his companions to conceal themselves, he approached the travellers, as nearly as he could, without being perceived, and watched them till he saw them enter the private gate of the Casa di Perollo. With this intelligence he hastened on to the place of his destination, to inform his chieftain of the circumstance to which he had been witness.

The succeeding parties were longer in arriving, having been obliged to conceal themselves, for some time, from the search of a band of horsemen, who had scoured the road to Caltabellotta and Bivonia, being some of those sent by don Paolo in search of Solanto.

"They are evidently spies of the Perollo, and will doubtless fall in with some of our companions," said Marco Luchese to Infontanetta, on his arrival.

"No matter," replied don Pietro, "they can have no cause to suspect unarmed men proceeding in such small companies. Many of our troops are already come, and some will doubtless pass unseen, in the darkness of night, as you have done."

With some of the succeeding bands, the scouts in search of the baron met; but having questioned them on the persons who had passed them on the road, and hearing no tidings of Solanto, they had not proceeded, but diverged into more unfrequented paths, in other directions, by which the greater number of the partisans of Luna gained the city unperceived.

The information of Calandrino seemed to have great effect upon Luna; he inquired anxiously and repeatedly if he could tell him who was in the litter, or from whence it came.

"It appeared to have come from the baths," said Calogero, "and might perhaps be Giacomo's wife returning from a visit to the Solanto family."

The conduct of Costanza, during his interview with her, in the evening, had astonished and perplexed the count; and the detail of Calandrino awakened his fears, lest she should, by an immediate application to Perollo, shew her independence of himself and his friends.

The horsemen sent out by don Paolo proved that Pandolfina had been apprised of the absence of the baron, and was exerting himself to recover him.

It was late before Accursi d'Amato arrived, and Adriano did not make his appearance till the succeeding day. It had been determined by the party in Luna Castle to conceal, as carefully as possible, the circumstance of their being inmates of the city, and to be in ambush till the moment of executing their project of revenge against don Giacomo. The count was therefore prevented from making inquiries in person at the cassino, relative to the proceedings of Solanto's family; but a domestic was dispatched, early in the morning,

in the name of the countess Caltabellotta, to inquire if the baron was returned, and to learn how the ladies were employed.

The answer his messenger brought back confirmed the worst fears the count had entertained. He was thunderstricken at the intelligence that the ladies had taken up their abode at the Casa di Perollo, without any mention of returning during the mysterious absence of the baron.

Della Bardia was summoned to a private interview, as Sigismund did not wish immediately to publish the affair amongst his friends, and to expose his chagrin and disappointment.

Accursi found the count in a state of fury bordering on desperation.—“ These fiends have at length succeeded,” he cried, “ in robbing me of the treasure I had hoped was now my own! the wife and daughter of Solanto are inmates of Perollo Castle, and that insidious young traitor, the son of Giacomo, will now espouse the plighted bride of Luna, and laugh at his folly and delusion in letting the prize escape him.”

“ Probably, signor,” said D’Amato.

“ And this then is to be the end of **all** our stratagems! all my exertions are to come at length to this! Curse on the folly that made me listen to Adriano and his schemes! myself to be the cause of **all** this mischief—to be defeated by the perverseness of a girl, and made the tool of Pandolfina!”

“ Adriano,” said Della Bardia, coolly, “ was the adviser, and ought to bear the blame of a defeat, which his mighty wisdom surely could have foreseen, and ought to have guarded against.”

“ I sent not for you, signor,” said Luna, “ to discover where the blame of our failure should fall, but to find a remedy.”

“ Patience!” said Accursi, with a shrug.

“ My blood is too hot to bear these taunts, signor; nor did I expect my feelings to be thus outraged by your indifference.”

“ I am called on,” answered Della Bardia, “ to remedy an evil brought on by the folly of another, when nothing but pa-

tience remains ; had I been consulted earlier in this affair, the present dilemma would not have occurred."

" Indeed !" interrupted Sigismund ;  
" and how could it have been prevented ?"

" When Accursi d'Amato, signor, has the game within his toils, he is not wont to let it thus escape him. You had Solanto and his family within your walls, surrounded by your friends and partisans ; force should have completed their engagements ; and when again these females were deprived of their natural guardian, why did you not forestall Perollo, and send the unprotected ladies hither ?"

" I want not to be informed as to what might have been done," said Luna, impatiently, and unwilling to accuse himself in the affair, " but what there now remains to do, to prevent the probable effect of these ladies seeking an asylum with Perollo."

" Had we all our forces here, it might be possible to surprise the castle, and effect

a rescue by force; but the small number of our men makes this impracticable."

Adriano entered the apartment as Della Bardia was speaking.—"Congratulate me, signor," he said, "on the full success of my undertaking; may the same fortune crown all the enterprises of the house of Luna!"

"Santa Maria prevent your prayers, Peralta!" said Accursi.

While Luna frowned in anger, the baron looked to both in wonder for an explanation.

"The lady Costanza and her mother are fled to Perollo for protection," said DiAmato, with a sneer; "and if you exert your wonted sagacity, signor, you may perhaps be employed to draw up the marriage articles of Federico and Costanza."

Adriano looked to Sigismund in dismay and confusion.—"It is even so, baron Adriano; a proper subject for congratulation, think you, this termination of your manoeuvring? no doubt you will easily

devise a remedy to counteract the mischief which is done."

"A little more caution," said Accursi, "may perhaps be necessary, to avoid expediting the nuptials, for which this flight of the ladies will be so fair a pretext."

"Barone della Bardia," replied Adriano, "if I have failed, it has not been through want of devotion to my kinsman's cause; nor shall my future exertions be wanting to repair any errors I may have committed; but I do not see the present motives for condemning the plan I advised count Sigismund to follow."

"Peralta will, without a question, make his own cause good, signor," said Accursi; "and having now so able and so fortunate a counsellor, my services, I trust, may be dispensed with."

"I should rather," answered Adriano, "avail myself of any assistance your advice can give, signor, though perhaps it may not be delivered with all the consideration towards my feelings which I could wish; yet I am not so lukewarm in the

service of count Luna, as to risk the injury of his interest from any personal feelings, and shall act with more confidence, if you will give your opinion on the proceedings I may think proper to advise at the present juncture."

"In professions or devices," replied Accursi, "the baron Adriano will never be found wanting; but the wisdom of his schemes may require some deliberation."

"Which is just what I require you, signor, to bestow upon them. I have no doubt," he continued, "that your anxiety, count Luna, at the conduct of the wife and daughter of Solanto, will be needless."

"I should be happy to find it so," said Luna; "but, with the full conviction of the love this son of Pandolfina entertains for the signora di Solanto, the opportunities their present intercourse will give him to press his suit, the arguments he may draw, and the suspicions he may excite, respecting my conduct, I must confess that no little sophistry is wanting to make me regard the present situation of affairs

with composure, or any hope of future benefit from our exertions."

"During the absence of her father, and under such circumstances, it is not probable that the lady Costanza will contract an engagement of so important a nature, as that of betrothing herself to the son of Perollo, or even that she will accept his offers of affection. Her anxiety and grief will fully occupy her for a time, and give us an opportunity to perfect our schemes. By the success of our great design against her present protector, we may hope to cut off at least one object of alarm. And why may not this dreaded Federico be one of our earliest victims? if our swords are charged with the fate of Pandolfina and his house, a few days will probably deliver you from all these jealous fears. Deprived of don Giacomo, his party will not dare to make head against the power of your excellenza, and the just claims your engagement with Solanto furnish will be irresistible to a dispirited faction; or, should our intended vengeance, by any unfore-

seen event, be delayed or counteracted, the ladies may be decoyed by stratagem from their asylum, or terrified by threats from unknown quarters, which, in their present state of doubt and anxiety, must weigh upon the minds of weak and timid females."

"Your advice is specious, as it generally is, signor," said Della Bardia; "but remember that you have Perollo to deal with, as well as these weak females, who have shewn no want of resolution in the decided step they have thus promptly taken: if we succeed in fulfilling our revenge upon Perollo, still, unless all the race can be exterminated, these ladies will find advisers and defenders to protect them from your violence or deceit, and will probably apply to the reigning powers, with whom we know, by fatal experience, the influence of Perollo; and this Solanto also was too highly in favour at the imperial court, to suffer his disappearance to pass unquestioned, or his wife and child to be left defenceless. I am still for open force;

had we all our troops within the city, they might be cantoned amongst our friends, and the castle be surprised."

"Let us first follow up our plans against don Giacomo," said Adriano, "and then your scheme, signor, will be feasible enough; at present, there can be no cause for alarm with regard to the lady Costanza; and, before she can have recovered from the shock of her recent loss, we shall be enabled to follow up our blow, and to deprive her of her present protector—all shall yet be well, count Luna paramount in Sciasca, and Costanza di Solanto, his affianced bride, restored in triumph to his arms."

Sigismond listened to his advisers with some complacency, and was soon persuaded into something like composure, and to give up his thoughts to the conduct of their main design. The armed band were kept with the utmost privacy within the castle, and spies placed in every possible direction, to watch the motions of Perollo and the inmates of his castle.

CHAPTER V.  
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'Twill vex thy soul to hear what I shall speak ;
For I must talk of murders,
Acts of black night, abominable deeds,
Complots of mischief, treason, villainies,
Ruthful to hear. *Titus Andronicus.*

THE proceedings of count Luna and his friends had not been so secret as to escape the knowledge of Pandolfina, who had been apprised of their assemblage and expedition to Sciacca ; and not wishing to disturb the public peace by any broils or tumult, he determined to remain a voluntary prisoner within the walls of his castle, and to keep his party also from any encounter with the opposite faction.

The inquiries after Solanto had been pursued by his emissaries with unabated zeal, and a courier had been dispatched to the viceroy with the information of the

baron's sudden disappearance. But no clue had yet been discovered which might explain the affair, or tranquillize the agitated feelings of the family. The baroness still continued in a state of hopeless despondency, and Costanza was herself too deeply distressed to be able to offer much comfort to her mother.

Don Giacomo had sent a messenger in their name to Bivonia, to inform count Luna of the dangerous state into which the baroness had been thrown, and exhorting him, by every tie of friendship and compassion, to assist them.

After some delay, a reply was sent, requesting the ladies to return to their casino, and assuring them, that every exertion would then be made by the house of Luna, and that they should not despair of being successful; intimating, that while they remained in their present abode, count Luna could not communicate with them, and that his exertions therefore would be of no avail.

The conduct of Federico Perollo during

this time was guarded in the extreme; it is true, he seldom saw the lady Costanza, whose hours were principally passed with her mother and the baroness Pandolfina (their kind hostess quitting her unhappy friend as rarely as possible); yet, when they did meet, he kept the strictest watch over every word and action, that nothing might escape him offensive to the delicate situation in which she was placed, or which might be construed into any thing like taking advantage of the melancholy event which had driven her for refuge beneath his father's roof.

For some days all the Perollo party confined themselves to the castle, and even the dependants of the family were allowed to be as little as possible within the city; but the signora di Solanto, wishing to have some of their property removed from the cassino, don Giacomo was induced to send twelve men, under the direction of two of his favourite officers, Antonio Margieri and Francisco Scanzarella, to convey it to the castle.

Count Luna and his partisans impatiently awaited the time when Perollo should issue from his castle; but, day after day, they were disappointed in their wishes. The gates of the Casa di Perollo were closed, and all was quiet within the walls. Don Sigismund was among the most anxious of his party; he could learn no tidings of donna Costanza, and all the arguments of Adriano, to tranquillize his mind on the subject of Federico Perollo, were fruitless. His jealous fancy had pictured them as already married, and laughing at his ill-conducted plans, which had hastened the event, and congratulating themselves on the excuses they might derive from his ill-governed temper, and the untoward events it had occasioned. At times he was nearly tempted to listen to the furious suggestions of Della Bardia, to summon the remainder of his forces from Bivonia, and to assault in open warfare the towers of his enemies; the entreaties of Adriano, and the determined resistance of many of the more prudent of his party, alone pre-

vented him from giving way to his violence and impetuosity, and risking all on the hazard of this hopeless scheme.—“ It was impossible,” they said, “ that Perollo should long continue in his present state of seclusion, but that he must soon afford them the opportunity they wished for;” and several refused to join in any attempt which must end in defeat, as such an open attack was sure to do.

During the time they thus remained inactive, the count had made inquiries of his mother, as to the truth of the statement which Accursi d’Amato had given him of the existence of his sister.

The countess had expected the conversation, and prepared herself to meet the questions of her son upon the subject. Whatever were the faults of count Sigismund, and they were manifold and grievous, want of respect and affection to his sole remaining parent was not one of them; the defects in his own temper made him look with indulgence on his mother’s violence and ill-humour; and her

ardent affection for him, which she had shewn on all occasions, and at all hazards and sacrifices, would easily have obliterated the remembrance of weightier sins than any he suspected her of committing.

With feelings, therefore, of reluctance, he prepared for the unpleasant task of searching into this secret and equivocal affair. He opened the subject with every possible expression of delicacy towards her, and of his perfect confidence in the rectitude of her intentions, thus giving her time to collect her thoughts to meet the investigation; and having briefly stated the circumstances of Della Bardia's information, he requested her to confirm or deny it.

"However injuriously I may have been treated by Accursi," she said, "it never was my intention to have kept you much longer in ignorance, my son, of the existence of your sister, for such is Francisca di Luna; he has betrayed the secret sooner than I intended it should be known, and related the circumstances in a way,

perhaps, to make you judge unfavourably of my conduct in this affair; but I trust I can explain the whole to your satisfaction, and vindicate myself in your eyes, at least, from any aspersions he may have cast upon me."

Sigismund professed his perfect reliance upon her, but assured her that Accursi had given no detail of events, which he confessed he felt deeply interested to be informed upon.

"You must well remember, my son," she said, "the period of Frantisca's birth—an event prematurely brought on by the death of your father, from which her infancy was rendered so weak and sickly, that she appeared, from the first, as if devoted to the grave. In this extremity I (rashly perhaps) vowed, should her life be spared, to dedicate her to the shrine of Santa Caterina, and from that moment her strength and health rapidly improved. Fearful lest my purpose should be frustrated by the opposition of my family, I instantly conveyed my child to the con-

vent, and, by the aid of a domestic, caused her death to be generally believed. In the meantime, Francisca gradually improved under the care of the superior, one of my earliest friends, with whom she has been, until the present act of Della Bardia removed her from her convent. The will of Manfredi Peralta, which divided his immense wealth in equal shares between your father's heirs, induced me to conceal, with the greatest strictness, the existence of any claimant except yourself, not wishing to enrich the convent with the spoils of my child's inheritance, or to diminish the grandeur of the house of Luna, by diverting its property into other channels. By what means Accursi made himself master of the secret, I know not; but having done so, he never ceased from importuning me upon the subject, threatening to disclose the purport of Peralta's will, and to rend the portion of Francisca from her family. The strong dislike I felt to meet the odium which this disclosure must have brought upon our house, tempted me to

listen to his proposals, to break my resolution, and to change the destination of my child ; but Della Bardia has hurried on beyond the limits I had conceded ; and without waiting for the approbation of any member of her family, has possessed himself of the hand of Francisca. It is now too late to remedy this evil, and will be useless to expose the private transactions of our house ; therefore, as Accursi has given me his word to keep the secret till Solanto's daughter is secured, we must compromise the matter with him."

This detail was far from satisfactory, even to count Luna, who observed, that it was something unlike the usual spirit of his mother thus to yield to the insolence of Della Bardia.

"The fear," she said, "of throwing any impediment in the way of her son's success with the daughter of Solanto, and an unwillingness to expose the name of Luna to the censure which might have fallen upon it, from any false statement of the affair, induced her to temporize, when the

audacity of Accursi led him to the step he had taken ; but as resentment on their part would now be of no avail, the countess earnestly implored her son to overlook the past, and when his own nuptials were completed, to acknowledge and receive his sister ; nor to weaken the power and influence of his family by dissensions among themselves, particularly at a juncture like the present, when so much was at stake.

Don Sigismund had never before seen his mother acting under any other influence than that of her own ungoverned temper. She was now attempting to gloss over the unjustifiable act to which ambition, and the desire of aggrandizing her son, had excited her ; and suffering under the fear of confessing enough to condemn her in the eyes of the count, or of concealing so much as might draw forth the anger of Accursi, it was with difficulty she restrained her rage against the latter from bursting out ; but the terrors of his vengeance were more than she

dared venture to provoke. Unaccustomed to contradict his mother, or to question the propriety of her conduct, count Luna did not, in the present instance, doubt the truth of her statement; and however he might wonder at her actions, it did not enter his imagination to discredit or condemn them; and when he parted from her, after the explanation she had chosen to give, she congratulated herself, with no little justice, on the good effects her management had produced.

The excursion of the party from the Casa di Perollo was soon made known to count Luna and his friends, who, impatient of their long confinement, eagerly caught at an opportunity of sacrificing some of their enemies, and resolved no longer to wait for don Giacomo alone, but to assail any of his friends either by force or stratagem.

The conduct of those who were now to be sent out against the adherents of Perollo, was given to Accursi d'Amato, Ferrante Luchese, and Pietro Infontanetta,

who selecting twenty of the boldest and stoutest of their followers, prepared, with joyful alacrity, for the encounter.

Every thing had been so long in readiness, that no time was lost; but as soon as it was decided to whom the enterprise was to be confided, they mounted their horses, and rode furiously towards the Porta degli Bagni, whither Antonio Margieri and his band had directed their course.

Fearing lest any accident should prevent his sanguinary purpose, Della Bardia exhorted his companions to lose no time in the pursuit; nor when within musket-shot, to wait for parley, or to give their enemies time for preparation, but to level their carbines, and let none escape them.

They then hurried on, with all the speed the rugged pathway would admit; and on reaching the brow of the descent towards the baths, saw their enemies at no great distance before them.—“Now for Luna and Peralta!” exclaimed Della Bardia; and such was their impatience, that

their first volley, which had they reserved their fire till a nearer approach, might have been fatal to half the companions of Margieri, wounded but two of them. His brother fell from his horse, and Scanzarella received a ball through his shoulder.

The retainers of Perollo halted; surprised, but not dismayed, they faced their enemy. Antonio exhorted them to make a gallant defence—"Our only hope," he said, "must be in cutting our way through this troop of assassins." Some of the men attempted to raise the fallen body of his brother, but life was totally extinct.

"To revenge his fall is all we now can do," said Margieri. "Attend to Scanzarella."

The latter seemed incapable of sitting his horse; but his companions placed themselves around him, and gallantly advanced against the adherents of Luna. Though the numbers were so fearfully unequal, an arduous struggle ensued; the valour of the assailants was met with as determined resolution. Scanzarella was totally incapable.

of defence, and the generosity of his companions would not allow them to neglect his safety ; but they attempted in vain to force their way through their opponents.

The fight was long and obstinate ; three of the partisans of Luna had fallen, and Infontanetta was wounded. Margieri and his friends had also suffered severely ; and Scanzarella, during the conflict, fell from his horse, and, in spite of the exertions of his party, was trampled to death beneath their chargers. The adherents of Perollo began to give way — Accursi d'Amato pressed on with sanguinary fury ; he had received a wound from the sword of Margieri, and infuriated at the sight of his flowing blood, redoubled his blows.

“ Let us retreat to the lower road,” said one of Antonio’s men, “ and we may gain the advantage of the ground, and succeed in reaching the castle gate, or obtain succours to match the number of our enemies.”

Della Bardia pressed violently forward, endeavouring to prevent their retreat,

when his horse fell, and he received at the same time a violent blow from the hand of Margieri, which rolled him in the dust; but the sword had only lighted on his helmet, and sheared the plume from his crest. Don Ferrante threw himself from his horse, and extended his shield over his fallen friend. The party were thrown into some confusion, and Antonio again strove to force his way through; but they still closed up the road against him; and Della Bardia was beginning to recover, when the objects of his vengeance wheeled round, took advantage of the exertions their enemies were making to remount the fallen baron, and finally succeeded in gaining the lower road. Soon however they were pursued by Luchese, and several of his men, who once more discharged their carbines, and wounded Margieri, and two of his followers. They again encountered on the brow of a hill, nearly within view of Perollo Castle. Antonio, though suffering severely from his wounds, roused the courage of his men—"One more suc-

cessful struggle," he said, "and we shall teach these ruffians to stoop to the valour of Perollo."

"Hew them down for Luna and Peralta!" exclaimed Della Bardia, forcing his horse impetuously up the hill towards the scene of action; "vengeance for the insult I received," he continued, aiming a blow at Margieri, "shall soon overtake Perollo and his slaves."

His antagonist warded the stroke; and exerting all his remaining strength and skill, he deprived the furious baron of his sword, who, catching a dagger he wore by his side, made a second blow, which, falling short of Antonio, wounded his horse, which springing forward from the pain, flew up the rocky way, but not till the sword of his gallant rider had inflicted a deep wound in the side of Accursi. Lucchese once more rushed forward to defend him, but the party of Margieri seeing their leader borne away by his ungovernable steed, rode after him, and left the followers of Della Bardia to attend to him, and re-

store the sword of which he had been deprived. Regardless of the blood which flowed from his wound, he urged his comrades to the pursuit; but their opponents had gained the summit of the hill, and were too near their friends in the castle to afford any hopes of completing their murderous intentions; the party therefore rode back in search of those who had fallen in the affray.

Near the bottom of the hill lay the corpse of the younger Margieri, who had been the first victim of Della Bardia and his crew. A bullet had struck him through the head, and he had fallen instantly lifeless. His friends had removed him from the roadway; but when they found all their attentions to him were in vain, they abandoned him, in the hope of saving the wounded Scanzarella.

When the murderers arrived where the body lay, they halted, to enjoy the sight of their bloody act—"It is Margieri's brother," said one of the party, looking at the dead man. In an instant Accursi had

thrown himself from his horse, and, in spite of faintness, he seized the lifeless body with a look of savage fury, which appalled even the hearts of his companions, and dashing it upon the rock, stamped violently upon it, hewing it with his sword, and imprecating curses on all the adherents of Perollo, and more particularly the race of Margieri. Luchese remonstrated against this useless barbarity; but Della Bardia still continued to vent his rage upon the corpse, till the exertion brought a second stream of blood from his side, and he sunk lifeless beside the object of his sanguinary vengeance.

The body of Scanzarella had been trodden in the dust beneath the horses feet; but Luchese ordered both that and the mutilated remains of Margieri, to be conveyed to the neighbouring convent of San Francisco. Of their own party, two were dead, a third desperately wounded, Accursi senseless from loss of blood, and Infontanetta scarcely able to sit his horse.

They were however greeted on their return with rapturous joy, though their work had been so imperfectly performed; yet to have made their first assault on the party of Perollo, seemed to be the beginning of the series of triumphs which they confidently anticipated.

Don Sigismund appeared unable to express the pleasure he took in the service his friends had performed. As soon as Accursi was a little recovered, he overwhelmed him with thanks, presented him with a valuable diamond, and declared himself eternally obliged to him. To Luchese he presented a valuable charger, and gave Infontanetta a jewel of great price; whilst to all the vassals engaged in the expedition he ordered a considerable largess to be given. The gates of the castle were thrown open, and the whole troop issuing out, paraded the streets in complete armour, as if in triumph at their victory, and in defiance of the vengeance of the baron Pandolfina.

On their return to the castle, the count

ordered a banquet to be spread in the great hall, and all the retainers to be feasted. Such of the nobles of the city as had hitherto remained secret enemies of Perollo, now flocked to the castle of his adversary. Amongst others, came Del Nadore, and one of his colleagues in office, Giovanni Maurici—"But here comes one," said count Luna, "whom I hardly hoped to see amongst us—Geronimo Ferrara!"

"No good purpose brings him here," said Adriano, in a low voice. "Under the mask of friendship and candour, he is the spy of don Giacomo, and now will strive to fathom all our future plans. Under pretence of healing the strife which is begun, he comes to wrest our weapons from our hands, and give us up, defenceless and unarmed, as victims to the rage of Pandolfina."

"We have never found him false," said Sigismund.

"From whom but some such neutral friend can Perollo have had such infor-

mation as he always boasts of all our private actions? This too is the friend, who, I suspect, carried the poison to Solanto's care, which blighted all your hopes from thence."

The near approach of the person of whom he spoke checked Peralta. The contrast of the tall and venerable figure of Ferrara, with the surrounding groups, struck Luna forcibly. Totally unarmed, clad only in the robes of peace, he advanced slowly through the crowd of armed warriors who filled the hall; his white locks hung from his uncovered head, and an air of sad and silent commiseration marked his countenance, as he received the embrace of don Sigismund. Like an evil genius, Adriano stood by the side of his kinsman, ready to misinterpret every word and action of Ferrara.

"Welcome, don Geronimo, amongst my friends," said Luna, kindly; "I had scarcely hoped to see you with us; and the high value I have always felt for your

opinion, adds weight indeed to the kindness and countenance this visit gives to our proceedings."

Don Geronimo sighed heavily.

"Accomplished hypocrite!" whispered Adriano; "he was just seen to come from the Casa di Perollo, and has probably been urging the suit of his young friend, Federico, with the same weapons he brings to conquer us—his sighs and groans."

"I have known your excellenza," said Ferrara, "from infancy to manhood; I have watched with interest and affection the growth of your many virtues, and lamented the foibles I have seen arise amongst them. I had hoped to see honour and renown accumulated on the house of Luna by count Sigismund, and cannot but regret the dangerous precipice to which you are now hastening. Hear me, count Luna! these deadly foes to the house of Perollo would seize the serpent by any other hands than their own; for the love of Heaven, and all its saints, listen not to their seductions! in seeking the ruin of

Pandolfina's race, you seek, at the same time, the downfall of your own. By every tie of humanity, by every bond of Christian charity, I implore you to attend to me! I willingly offer myself as a mediator between the chieftain of Perollo and yourself; I pledge my life and honour to redress your wrongs with full and ample satisfaction—with oblivion for the past, and for the future the friendship of the baron Pandolfina, which shall more avail to your happiness and glory, than all the power of such false friends as those, who, for their own interest, and their own revenge, are urging you on to certain destruction."

Count Luna turned away in silent anger.

"This well-delivered speech, signor Geronimo," said Adriano, "comes a little too late and out of season."

An insulting laugh from Del Nadore applauded the reply; but the frowns of many of the party shewed that they felt the reproaches of Ferrara deeper.

He saw the fruitless nature of his visit, and with a respectful salutation, which was unheeded by Luna, retired from the hall.

“ Insolent and malignant spy !” said Talyavia ; “ has don Giacomo no better methods of defence than to send such emissaries here, to sow dissensions in our party ?”

“ Unless don Sigismund intends to countenance the aspersions this insidious foe has cast upon us all,” said Adriano, “ he will give his orders that punishment shall speedily overtake him.”

“ His blood alone can wash away the indignity !” cried Calandrino.

Luna still was silent.

“ A glorious opportunity is now offered,” continued Adriano, “ to shew the confidence you feel in your friends ; to prove to the Perollo, that endeavours to alienate your affection from us, will meet with exemplary chastisement. And it will be a lesson,” he added, in a lower tone, “ to all who may henceforth aid

and avenge the treacheries of Federico with Costanza di Solanto."

"Be it as you will," said Sigismund.

"Follow the traitor, and dispatch him instantly!" cried Adriano, loudly.

Several of the vassals, at the lower part of the hall, half intoxicated with wine, and the ardour of the time, rushed furiously into the streets towards the abode of Ferrara, who was proceeding up the flight of steps to his residence; but seeing the approach of some of the partisans of Luna, bearing the badges of their faction, and brandishing their naked weapons, he stopped to watch their proceedings; they advanced rapidly towards him, but he felt neither fear nor suspicion, when two of the ruffians, running up the steps, buried their poniards in his side, and he fell a lifeless corpse from the top of the steps to the bottom.

The murderers having completed their act of butchery, they returned, waving their bloody weapons, and crying—"Viva Lu-

na è Peralta : dentà ai Peralta and his spies !”

Their return was greeted with shouts of exultation by their companions : but count Luna looked not as if he partook in the immoderate joy of his friends.

The return of Margieri and his wounded associates had excited a general indignation throughout the Casa di Perollo. The impatient vassals and soldiers of don Giacomo urged him with vehemence to allow them to revenge the outrage by an attack on the Castel di Luna.

The baron, however, firmly resisted their entreaties, resolved to stand on the defensive, and call on the viceroy to punish, by a legal process, the atrocious offenders. He well knew that an act of violence on his part would be a plea with his enemies to justify any future crimes they might commit ; and, as a strenuous defender of the laws of his country, he did not choose now to violate them, by taking the redress of his partisans into his own hands.

To the entreaties of his followers he replied, by pointing out how much beneath their characters as soldiers it would be, to take upon them an office which would soon be performed by the public executioner; and how derogatory to them, as citizens and adherents to him, who in every instance had maintained the cause of civil justice, to give themselves up to their passions, and be parties in exciting a popular commotion from motives of private feeling.

The murder of don Geronimo Ferrara was soon after known, and excited deeper feelings of horror and detestation, plunging all the family of Pandolfina in sorrow and affliction. The baron invited all connected with him, by any tie whatever, to take refuge within the walls of his castle, until the violent faction of their enemies could be brought to legal punishment.

Every member of the family repaired to the castle, with all their retainers, except Francisco Perollo, who had been placed by don Giacomo, with Del Nadore, among

the five *giurati* of the city, and who excused himself from his official capacity, but afterwards escaped from Sciacca, terrified at the danger of the name he bore.

Count Sambuca, his lady, and her brother the baron Celano, who were in the city at the time, availed themselves of the protection offered by their kinsman; and before evening, all Perollo's connexions in Sciacca had secured themselves within his towers. The drawbridge was up, the walls well manned; and, without any act of hostility, Pandolfina manifested his resolution and ability to protect to the utmost his family and friends from the outrages of their infuriated enemies.

The passing events were easily concealed from the unhappy baroness Solanto, who appeared gradually sinking under her sorrows; but her kind hostess, though anxious and alarmed at the threatening evil, still bore herself with the composure and dignity of her general character.

Marguerita exerted herself more than she had done since the melancholy death

of her father, to cheer the spirits of Costanza, and assist in the care of the baroness, and the exertion appeared to be of infinite use to her.

The signora di Solanto spent her time almost entirely with her mother, and struggled with her own feelings of despondency to cheer the baroness. Vague tidings had been heard of some persons who were seen in the mountains at no great distance from Sambuca; but this tale could give no clue to the mysterious disappearance of Solanto. The environs of the casino had carefully been searched, and as no trace of blood, nor the marks of any violence, had been discovered, Pandolfina and his friends were still sanguine in their belief, that the baron was only held in confinement by the policy of the Luna faction, until don Sigismund had secured the hand of Costanza.

During these events, Federico had remained a silent, but deeply-interested spectator; whenever Costanza appeared, he had, by every delicate attention, attempt-

ed to cheer her spirits, and to inspire her with hopes for the safety of her father, and the ultimate recovery of her mother, and declared his readiness to undertake any plan she might devise to discover intelligence of her lost parent.

His conduct failed not to make the impression it deserved—Costanza felt and appreciated his delicacy. From the moment she had considered her engagement with count Luna at an end, she had ceased to prevent her thoughts from dwelling on Federico Perollo; and although during her present distress she had few moments in which her mind was unoccupied by the doubtful state of both her parents, yet there were intervals at which she did think, and think favourably, of Federico.

The count Sambuca offered to make his way to his castle, and raising his own retainers, and the friends of Perollo, the marquis Geraci and the baron Partanna, to reinforce the garrison within the castle; but their strength was considered fully adequate to the defence, and his offer was

siege. The watchful care of the baron and don Paolo saw every thing placed in security, and the night passed without any attempt, from the adherents of Luna, to disturb the peace of the Casa di Perollo.

CHAPTER VI.

“ Go bid the timid lover choose,
And I'll resign my charter,
If he for ten kind how-d'y'dos,
One kind good-bye would barter.”

THE viceroy received, at Messina, the information forwarded to him by Perollo, respecting the affairs of Sciacca, and instantly summoned the council of state, to communicate to them the contents of the dispatches he had received.

Count Sigismund di Luna, his highness informed the assembly, having placed himself at the head of a factious multitude, and being joined by many nobles in Sciacca and its vicinity, had made himself master of the city : there being no power sufficient to curb their deeds of lawless violence and outrage, the insurgents had at-

tacked a party of the adherents of the baron Pandolfina, some of whom they had slain, and others desperately wounded ; and afterwards most inhumanly murdered don Geronimo Ferrara, a cavalier of rank, whose virtues had endeared him to all his fellow-citizens. And, further, he stated, that the rebels who had thus outraged the majesty of the empire, and the laws of civil society, still sought the destruction of the gallant don Giacomo Perollo ; and that, unless their crimes were visited with promptness and celerity, these atrocious transactions would affix an eternal stain upon the present government of the island.

The council were unanimous in expressing their abhorrence at the conduct of the insurgents, and in advising the most decided measures to be instantly taken for bringing them to punishment.

It was resolved, that don Geronimo Starella, barone del Mundino, a noble Catanese officer, should be sent with a sufficient military force to quell the disturbance ; and, that his proceedings might not

want the solemnity of legal authority, a number of counselors and lawyers were to attend him, for the purposes of examining into the affair, and of inflicting punishment upon the guilty.

To don Geronimo, the commander, his highness particularly commended his friend, the baron Pandolfina, desiring that every provision might be made to ensure his safety, and that his wishes should be attended to in all matters of consequence ; to which he added his earnest request, that all the expedition which justice would permit should be made in dispatching the affair, in order that the troops should not be taken from their destination, but, if possible, return in time to embark with the rest of the army for Italy.

The messenger who had brought the intelligence from Sciacca was sent back without delay, with an account of the determination of the viceroy, and the preparations which were making in consequence ; he was also the bearer of private

dispatches from his highness, which contained orders for the immediate return of Federico and Gaetano to head-quarters, the Imperial mandate being expected for the embarkation of the troops, and as, at all events, the viceroy wished to remove the young men from the scene of tumult and contest.

In four days the courier arrived in Sciacca, delivered his dispatches, and announced the coming aid. The letters which he brought all gave unmixed pleasure and satisfaction to Perollo, save that which contained the order for the departure of his son and Pignatelli.

To Federico this summons was a sentence which condemned him to despair and misery; he had of late indulged in such flattering hopes, that the blow, though no other than he had every reason to expect, overwhelmed him with the deepest sorrow. From the exertions of the government he had confidently expected the release of Solanto, whose connexion with count Luna would undoubtedly be at an

end, and himself therefore at liberty to offer his hand to the lady Costanza; and, just at this important crisis, to be called away, was a trial of fortitude not likely to be borne with equanimity by the ardent spirit of a youthful lover.

He received from his father the orders and the information contained in the dispatches, and concealing, as much as possible, the distress he felt, said, he would find Gaetano, and communicate to him the intelligence; and left the apartment, intending to go to his own, and there endeavour to recover his composure, when, hurrying along the corridor, he was met by Costanza.

The agitation of his countenance terrified her, and scarcely able to support herself, she clasped her hands, as in supplication to Heaven, and exclaimed—"Oh, Perollo! for what new misery am I to prepare?"

"None, none, to you, I trust, lady Costanza; do not alarm yourself; sit down here," he said, opening the door of the nearest room.

"There must be something, signor," she said, "or you could not look so changed since you left us just now."

"Dearest lady Costanza, I was distressed by an order from the viceroy for my instant departure."

Costanza felt ill, and looked very pale.

Federico sat down by her, and took her unreluctant hand.—"If," he said, much embarrassed, "I could only hope that my going or my return could be of interest to you, I should quit even you more cheerfully."

Costanza trembled with emotion, but was silent.

"Tell me, dearest Costanza, may I hope?"

She tried to speak, but burst into tears.

Federico drew her towards him, with the arm which had supported her to her seat, and she wept upon his shoulder in uncontrollable agitation.

For some minutes the feelings of both were at too high a pitch for words; and

Federico was just beginning to pour forth his gratitude and joy, when the opening door shewed the baroness Pandolfina.

Costanza started up, and threw herself into her arms.

“ My child, how is this ? Federico, have you forgotten for a moment the situation of lady Costanza ? ”

“ My dear mother, I met the lady Costanza, when I could think of nothing but the agony of leaving her. ”

“ Leaving her, my son ! ”

“ Do not you be distressed, my beloved mother ; we have been all along uncertain how soon this order might arrive. ”

“ And has it come, my darling child ? Good Heavens, to be taken from me at such a time ! yet, how often have I thought that you were safer any where than in Sciacca during these scenes of tumult and horror. ”

In the quickly-succeeding idea of parting from her son, the baroness had forgotten Costanza for a moment, but immediately recollecting herself, she embraced her

affectionately, and said—"I cannot chide you now, my children, though there are two who will have great right to do so: Federico, though you might perhaps reckon on your own father's happiness at receiving the lady Costanza into his family, still you could not answer for the baron Solanto."

Costanza hid her blushes on the bosom of the baroness, as she whispered that her father was not less indulgent, and that her engagement with count Luna he himself had broken.

"It would be to me," said the baroness, "a happiness only inferior to your own, my children, to witness the completion of your wishes; but, for the present, circumstanced as we all are, let the subject be carried no farther."

Federico was just beginning to remonstrate, when the baroness interrupted him with a smile, and added—"So much appears to have been effected by this sudden event, and the explanations it has produced, that surely, Federico, you may de-

part with confidence; and without urging our Costanza to repent the happiness she has conferred upon you; remember her situation at present, and the delicacy which is required from every member of our family."

Perollo, who was silent, and gazing on the blushing half-averted face of Costanza, heeded not his mother's inquiry respecting the tidings which had arrived with his orders. When she again repeated her question, he endeavoured to collect his thoughts, and to reply.

The signora di Solanto, with an affectionate embrace to the baroness, made her escape from the apartment, and Federico then seemed to recover the use of his faculties.—"Troops," he said, "are now marching hither, under the command of don Geronimo Statella, barone Mundino, with a sufficient number of legal advisers to search into and punish the atrocious crimes of these lawless ruffians; their arrival may be expected in two or three

days, and immediately after their coming we must obey our orders, and join his highness at head-quarters."

"At any other time I should more deeply have regretted our separation," replied the baroness; "but it will now be a consolation to me to know that you are safely removed from this scene of vindictive hatred, far from the machinations of the Luna party; and in the uncertainty under which the family of the baron Solanto suffer from his absence, it is better for the lady Costanza that you should be removed for a while, till, under better auspices, your mutual wishes may receive the sanction of both your families; and I trust, my child, that you will not seek, by any engagement, made without the consent of her parents, to bind the lady Costanza. It might be considered as taking an undue advantage of the circumstances which have driven her here for protection, and not only be a stain upon the name and family of Perollo, but displease the baron Solanto,

and eventually be a bar to the completion of your hopes."

Federico acknowledged the justice of his mother's sentiments, and with feelings very different from those which had occupied his bosom a few minutes before, he resumed his search for Gaetano.

He found his friend upon the ramparts with don Paolo.—"By your appearance, Federico," said Pignatelli, "the messenger from my uncle has brought pleasant intelligence."

"Orders are come for our immediate appearance at Messina," answered Federico.

"And is that the cause of your exuberant happiness?" asked Gaetano, in amazement.

Don Paolo also looked astonished, but said nothing.

"The barone del Mundino will be here in a day or two, with forces sufficient to quell the insurgents," said Perollo.

"And what beside? some still better news remains behind."

"Nothing," answered Federico.

"Nay," said Gaetano, "I am not to be told that the self-gratulation and pleasure in your countenance proceed either from the anticipation of our campaign in Italy, or that of don Geronimo Statella and the hangman in Sciacca; something more has given you these smiles—has any intelligence been received of the baron Solanto?"

"No," said Federico, looking gravely.

"And am I to receive no further elucidation on the subject?" asked Pignatelli.

"I have seen the lady Costanza," said Perollo, and hesitated.

"Really!" said his friend: "why I should have thought you might have done the same yesterday, or any day for this fortnight. I suppose she is equally enchanted at the prospect of our departure."

"The lady's sentiments upon the subject," replied Federico, "are all that I would have them; and, for the acknowledgment she has just made of them, I now ask the congratulations of don Paolo and yourself."

"You have done nothing clandestine, my dear Federico?" asked the former.

"My mother," he answered, "has not refused her approbation."

"What the baroness does not condemn," said don Paolo, with a smile, "I shall not long disapprove;" and embracing his young kinsman, he assured him of the interest he should ever take in his happiness, and that no event could give him equal satisfaction with that of seeing him united hereafter with the signora di Solanto.

"All I am at present sure of," replied Federico, "is the lady's consent. The baron Solanto will soon, I hope, be restored to us, and not prove more inexorable to our wishes. At present they remain unknown, except to you, my friends, and to my mother."

"But the particulars?" said Gaetano: "as far as I may be indulged, do, my dear friend, let me hear more on this subject."

"You have caught your mania from our fair friend Sambuca, I fear," said Perollo; "and this is no place for explanations."

“Not being so deeply interested in details of lovers conferences, and having other affairs upon my hands,” said don Paolo, “I shall retire, wishing you all the happiness which an union with donna Costanza promises; and to signor Pignatelli, all the patience a confidant stands in need of.”

The young men withdrew to the apartment of Gaetano, where Federico detailed all his newly-encouraged hopes, which his friend no longer sought to discourage; and the interview with Costanza seemed to have so entirely dissipated the cares of Perollo, that he had never appeared in such spirits since his arrival at his father's house, as now on the eve of quitting it.

The approach of the expected succours from Messina gave general satisfaction throughout the castle; preparations were busily carried on, as don Giacomo intended to offer the hospitalities of the Casa di Perollo to all the party. On the third day, the arrival of Statella was announced by a courier, dispatched to the giurati of

of the city, and leaving to the baron Pandolfina further despatches from the viceroy.

The baron excused himself from joining the party, who awaited at the city gates the representatives of the viceregal authority, as he wished not, by his presence, to excite any symptoms of discord, but requested the general and his troops would honour him by occupying the Casa di Perollo during their stay in Sciacca.

Upon his entrance into the city, Starella proceeded immediately to the residence of the baron Pandolfina, to thank him for his offer, which, however, he declined accepting, as not wishing to give so public a demonstration of partiality; and declared his intention of taking up his abode, during his stay, in the house of Stefano di Lauro, near the church of St. Cataldo (which in later times was the property of don Fabricio del Carretto, barone della Fabica, to whom it descended from his ancestors of the house of Luchese); but at the same time that the general declined

accepting the castle of don Giacomo as a permanent abode, he did not refuse to partake of a banquet, which had been prepared in honour of his arrival; and declared with how much pleasure he should return to avail himself of the kindness of the chief of Perollo, as soon as he had made arrangements for the accommodation of his followers.

The house of don Stefano was large and commodious, and easily accommodated Statella, his officers, and the legal advisers who attended him, whilst the troops were quartered in the neighbourhood. The whole affair was quickly arranged, when the general, and his principal companions, returned to fulfil their appointment with don Giacomo. A long consultation took place between the chiefs, Statella professing his intention to be guided in all things by the advice of Pandolfina; but requesting that as little open display as possible might be made of their private connexion, he informed Perollo of the wishes of the viceroy, that the affair should be dis-

patched with all possible expedition, in order that the troops might not be detained from their destined service.

“ With the number of our friends,” replied Perollo, “ it appears to me unnecessary to retain all the force the viceroy has sent us. The partisans of Luna, seeing the determined resolution with which his highness is prepared to assert the cause of justice, will hardly think of opposition; and your excellenza may shew your zeal for the Imperial cause, and your confidence in the loyalty of our citizens, by dismissing part of your men with my son and signor Pignatelli, who return to headquarters the day after to-morrow.”

To this proposition the general seemed much inclined to accede; but don Paolo urged, with great anxiety, that no such step ought to be ventured upon—“ It is at present unknown to any of us,” he said, “ what force the count now has at Bivonia, or what addition he may be able to make to it. The present power of your excellenza

will give you so decided a superiority over any number of men which they can have the means of bringing forward, as to make all opposition hopeless; but having once reduced your strength, they will gain confidence, and exert every nerve to avoid punishment, by adding to their crimes, and we may yet find ourselves too weak to resist their overwhelming force."

"Your caution, my dear Paolo," said don Giacomo, "is always prudent; but in the present instance it is, I think, rather carried beyond necessity; and the Imperial cause may suffer even from the slight reduction of the force which is now in Sciacca, besides the trouble and inconvenience it will hereafter be to convey them to the main body of the army, if they are delayed here till after the expedition has set sail."

Statella seemed more inclined to listen to the baron than to don Paolo; but nothing was decided at the time, and the general inquired if any particulars had yet

transpired respecting the fate of Solanto. To this Perollo answered in the negative ; he related the circumstances of the event, and his reasons for supposing don Sigismund to have been the principal contriver of the act ; and concluded by lamenting the melancholy effect it had produced upon the declining health of the baroness. Starella requested that the ladies might be informed of the assurances of the deep interest which his highness the viceroy felt for the baron's restoration, and which he had been commissioned to deliver. Federico immediately carried the message to the lady Costanza (who would not leave her mother to appear at the banquet), and brought back her most grateful acknowledgments for the kindness of his highness, and those whom he had deputed to act for him. The signora di Solanto endeavoured, but in vain, to restore her mother to hope and cheerfulness ; she had received a shock from which there appeared but little chance of her ever recovering, even

though Solanto himself should be instantly restored.

The proceedings at Luna Castle, after the murder of Ferrara, had been much baffled by the precautions taken by don Giacomo. The Luna party had hoped he would have been instigated to some act of hostility, which would have exposed him to their arms; but so well was the castle watched and guarded, and so strictly were its inmates confined within its limits, that no occasion offered to gratify their increasing desire for slaughter. The severe wound of Accursi d'Amato also confined him so closely, that for some days he was no more able to excite others to action, than to unite with them in it. Another circumstance, which considerably deranged their plans, was the prompt and decided steps which the viceroy appeared about to adopt. Till the arrival of Statella in Sciacca, they had fondly hoped that the Imperial mandate would have compelled the ducal to quit the island with all his forces,

and that the orders of those who were to march to punish their offences must be countermanded ; and that when once the army had quitted Messina, they would be able to act free from the fear of an overwhelming force. The irritation of don Sigismund was continually kept up by the artifices of his friend Adriano, and the vehemence of the countess, who seemed to have entered into the conspiracy with all the energy she possessed. Her pride was gratified in contemplating the strength and resources of the house of Luna, and her hatred and revenge fully satisfied in the anticipated downfall of Perollo. To the interference of her cousin, pope Clement, she confidently looked for the Imperial pardon ; and as affairs between the pontiff and Charles wore a more amicable aspect, she felt no fears for the conclusion of all things according to her wishes. The subject of Francisca was no longer one of such anxiety as it had been ; she had succeeded in overcoming any ill impression

it might leave upon the mind of Sigismund; and upon the full acknowledgment of her daughter's rights, Della Bardia repeatedly declared his intention of restoring the pledges which he held, and which she was so anxious to regain.

The feelings of the party, in regard to the unhappy family of Solanto, were various, and yet, openly, all appeared to continue most anxious for the completion of the count's engagement with the lady Costanza. Don Sigismund felt his passion increase with the obstacles to its gratification; he would almost have resigned his hopes of vengeance for the immediate possession of the object of his love; and her present protection in the Casa di Perollo appeared amongst the heaviest crimes of Pandolfina. The affliction under which they laboured from the absence of the baron, was a subject on which he thought as little as possible; and when it did occur, he called to his recollection that his offered services had been refused, and those of his

enemy accepted; and this excuse was generally the antidote by which he quieted his conscience on that head.

The countess, though anxious to secure the wealth of Solanto to her son, had yet had so severe a proof of the spirit she should have to encounter in Costanza, that she had lost much of her real anxiety on the subject; yet, in order not to displease her son, she still kept up the appearance of being most sincere in the cause, and did not even hint at the pleasure with which she should receive as wealthy a bride, with a temper more obsequious and yielding.

The baron Adriano, the great mover of all the actions, and many of the thoughts, of Sigismund di Luna, in this, as in every thing else, consulted entirely his own advantage and gratification. The fury he had conceived against the baron for the exposure of his conduct, and the slight consideration in which the lady Costanza had always held him, had steeled him against any suffering they might meet with; and as he no longer counted on the

power and support of the baron in their great design against Perollo, he had no motive to wish for the marriage; whilst, like the countess, he would willingly have transferred the count's affections to some female in whom he had not to fear a counteracting influence over his mind; yet he knew the passion of Luna to be too violent to bear opposition, and he found his jealousy of Federico Perollo at all times a useful weapon in his hands, wherewith to raise the slumbering fury, or to stifle the rising feelings of moderation, in the bosom of his friend.

The arrival of Statella in Sciacca threw all the party into consternation, and their debates upon the subject were long and anxious. To avoid the punishment they had provoked, or openly to defy it, was the alternative to which they appeared reduced, and various were the opinions which were given on the different methods to be pursued. Adriano was inclined to temporise—to disperse their assembly for a time—to conceal the principal delinquents, and,

by every species of delay, to endeavour to thwart the legal proceedings, until the patience of the viceroy should be worn out, and the troops ordered to their final destination; and when clear of these adversaries, he said, they might again assemble with what celerity they chose, and sate their anger against Pandolfina and his party.

To this Della Bardia, Calandrino, and several of the more vehement partisans, urged the difficulty, and almost impossibility, of concealing so large a number of persons as would undoubtedly be involved in the proscription dictated by the vengeance of Perollo. By separation also they would give their enemies the means of taking them singly; and without a hope of deriving any advantage from resistance, their force would then be exterminated, and the purpose of their foe effectually secured through their weakness and irresolution. Upon count Luna himself, left thus unsupported and undefended, the heaviest wrath of don Giacomo would assuredly

be poured, and not only would they be thus subjected to present punishment and degradation, but every future hope of compassing their ends would be annihilated.

The advocates for yielding to the storm, and withdrawing from its influence, declared the impracticability of resisting, with any hopes of success; the powers of the viceroy, united, as they would be, with the strength of Perollo and his friends, and if necessary, by aid drawn from the neighbouring towns; many also of those in Sciacca, who had stood as neutrals during the contest of the rival families, would consider themselves as obliged to take part with the representative of the Imperial power, and professed supporters of law and justice.

Don Sigismund, though unwilling to give up his plan, and disband his men, though conscious of the heavy accusations which, in all probability, would be brought against himself; yet could not but confess the fruitless prospect offered by open resistance. With respect to the deaths of

the younger Margieri and Scanzarella, he considered them as the chances of a hostile skirmish, for which no disgrace could attach to his party ; but the murder of Ferrara, even in his eyes, appeared an act of intemperate barbarity. It was not, however, now a question as to what had been done, but what course they must for the future pursue, to ensure their safety, and provide for their ultimate success in the contest.

A medium between the two opinions which had divided the party, was proposed by Pugiades, and met with approbation from all but Della Bardia, Ferrante Luchese, and Calogero Calandrino. His advice was, that the principal actors in the late scenes should return to Bivonia, where the great body of their forces still remained ; that the rest of the party in Sciacca should continue where they were, without shewing themselves openly, or making any display of opposition ; not refusing the jurisdiction of the viceregal messen-

gers, but keeping entirely out of their way, and by every device creating difficulty and delay ; and should circumstances allow of resistance, or the safety of their chieftain, count Luna, be endangered, he would still have force enough about him to defend his castle for some time, until, by treaty, some terms might be procured.

" Which," added Adriano, " we may keep or break, as we may hereafter find most to our advantage."

" No, signor barone," said Pugiades, " warm as I am in the cause, and devoted to count Luna, I should consider it no act of friendship towards him, to bring dishonour on his name and party, by compromising our good faith even with don Giacomo Perollo."

" Such sentiments," said Peralta, with some slight appearance of shame at the reproof, " are proper to be held out in public, but we shall find them useless in our present conflict with a power so superior to our own."

Don Sigismund interrupted the conver-

sation, and gave his most decided approbation to the counsel of don Michele, in which he was followed by a large majority; and it was determined immediately to remove from Sciacca Accursi d'Amato, Ferrante Luchese, Pietro Infontanetta, and those men who had been concerned in the attack on Margieri, and secretly to retain the rest of their forces.

The day before Federico and Gaetano were to leave Sciacca, the latter entered the apartment where the baroness usually passed the morning with her younger children, with whom the good temper and perpetual cheerfulness of Pignatelli made him a very great favourite; and in a moment the boy had found employment for him, in shewing the best way to new-feather his arrows, and to new-string the bow with which he intended to perform marvels against the Luna party; for all the moderation of the baroness could not prevent those who attended her children from teaching them that the house of Luna were foes.

"I promise you," said Gaetano, "that when I return, I will bring you the best bows and arrows in Sicily, if you will not insist on my repairing these just now, for I came to beg your mamma would indulge me in half an hour's conversation."

"Willingly," said the baroness; and giving permission to the boy to seek his brother in the armoury, and to the girls to go to Marguerita, she remained alone with Gaetano, who now seemed hesitating what to say; at last smiling, and sitting down by the baroness, he said—"I am not clear that you will not think me very absurd, or perhaps very vain, but I can think of no way so likely to be right, as one which will involve your *eccellenza* a little in my actions."

"My young friend, what ails you?"

"Nothing, I believe, except that I begin to think that I have caught the complaint of Federico, and fallen in love. I confess, indeed, I do not feel in any danger of dying immediately of my passion, and that I have still some very ungallant

doubt of such things ever taking place; but I think that I should live very much happier, and perhaps a little longer, if I could pass my future years with the signora Landolini. I am afraid I shall explain myself badly, but what I mean to say is, that I am conscious of a degree of attention to Marguerita, which, merely as her father's friend, I should not have been justified in shewing. I know not if it has been agreeable to her or otherwise, or if she has thought enough about me, unconnected with her father, to have observed it; for under so recent an affliction, to have sought such knowledge, would have been to insult her feelings; and going, as I am now, with the chances of war against my return, I would not seek to involve her in any engagement, even if I were sure I could persuade her to it. But, my dear madame, I do not think it generous or honourable in a man, after particular attentions, to leave any doubt of his sentiments with the lady; the world does excuse such things, but I could not; and what I would request of

you is, to assure her, whenever you think she will hear it most favourably, of my unalterable respect and affection for her, my earnest desire to devote my life to the happiness of hers; and to say further, that though she is perfectly free, my greatest indulgence will be thinking myself bound to her till she forbids me to do so."

"Excellent young man!" said the baroness, whilst her countenance shewed how she estimated such uncommon delicacy and generosity of feeling.

"Do not praise me," said Gaetano, "for endeavouring to appropriate the well-tryed worth of Marguerita: and I have yet another commission to trouble you with. This packet, if I return in safety, you will restore to me; if otherwise, it is for Marguerita, and will give her the only thing which would, I believe, add to her comfort now—I mean the power of shewing that independence of the unequalled bounty of yourself and the baron would not abate her respect or affection towards you."

"My dear young friend, Federico ever

spoke of your worth with so much enthusiasm, that I ought not to be surprised at what you now do; but I must be heartless indeed if I received such proofs of them unmoved. I trust and hope my lovely *protégée* will receive, in your safe return, the most precious gift Heaven can bestow upon her. But let me ask you one question. Should you not consult your uncle, ere you dispose either of your fortune or your hand?"

"No, my dear madame, not in this instance; I am more than of age to act for myself, and my fortune is in my own power; though not large, it is sufficient to support our rank. If I am so happy as to be accepted by the signora Landolini, I shall bring into my family one whose name is fully equal to my own; and if my uncle objected, he would be unjust, and therefore unworthy of attention; and though I have all due respect for a natural guardian, still I should not choose to be always in leading-strings; and if I suffered

any ideas of my uncle's future wealth to make me trifle with the feelings of an amiable woman, I should deserve to be left in the world alone, without one tie of friendship or affection to delight my youth, or to cheer my age. But I have taken up your time unmercifully with my egotism ; allow me to thank you for your indulgence."

"From the character of his highness," said the baroness, "there is little danger of his disapprobation ; and upon one condition I will freely and willingly accept the office you have thought proper to confer upon me ; and this condition is, that you inform the duca de Monteleone, immediately upon your arrival in Messina, of the steps which you have now taken."

"Most readily," replied Gaetano ; "it is far from my wish or intention that there should be any thing clandestine in an engagement upon which I shall always look with pride and satisfaction."

"These love-tales of yourself and Federico," said the baroness, with a smile,

“ come to light under strange auspices—in the midst of discord and preparation for war.”

“ All will end at length in peace and amity,” said Pignatelli.

“ Heaven make you a true prophet, my young friend! I cannot but feel the anxiety which the present time produces; the events of both your declarations have given me a deep and lasting satisfaction.”

They conversed for some time on the subject of Marguerita, with whose character her kind protectress had every day additional cause to be captivated.

Gaetano listened with no little delight to so grateful a subject, and had never thought the baroness herself half so charming. From the discussion of his affairs, they wandered to those of Federico and Costanza.

“ I am most anxious,” said his mother, “ for the event of the proceedings which will be instituted by the barone Mundino, in regard to the recovery of our lost friend. The restoration of the baron Solanto would,

I hope, confirm our happiness ; but should no information be procured relative to his mysterious absence, I tremble for the consequences. The baroness cannot long be supported in her present state of weakness and exhaustion ; and, in case of her death, the natural guardians of the lady Costanza may place obstacles in the way of their union, which may be insurmountable."

" A more proper connexion than with the heir of Pandolfina cannot, I should think, be found," replied Pignatelli ; " and as the inclination of the parties is so powerful a plea, I doubt not but the influence of don Giacomo could procure an Imperial mandate, which would set all debate upon the subject entirely at rest."

" Federico could scarcely be more sanguine, or more ready in devising expedients to remove all the difficulties in his way, than you are, signor."

The conversation was interrupted, and the remainder of the day was passed in rather melancholy anticipation of the parting on

the morrow. The baron and Statella had held a long deliberation on the question of dismissing the troops. The flight of Accursi d'Amato and his companions from Sciacca was soon known, as his friends wished not to conceal it, and seemed to declare the intentions of his party to submit without a struggle to legal authority.

A summons which was sent to count Luna to appear before the tribunal, was received without any sign of hostility or resistance, and no preparation seemed making by the party, which carried any show of their intention to resort to acts of violence, either to defend themselves, or oppose their judges.

Upon these grounds, and from the consideration of the advantage it would be to the Imperial arms to set the troops at liberty, and shew that no internal discord made the retaining garrisons in the island necessary to keep the public peace, the baron Pandolfina was desirous to expedite their return.

Statella also was anxious to shew his for-

wardness and activity in the cause of his Imperial master, and to anticipate the wishes of the viceroy.

Don Paolo Perollo alone resisted the opinion of the others; and such was the weight he possessed, that the delay of a day or two was granted, in order to ascertain what effect the commencement of the legal proceedings would have upon count Luna and his partisans.

Sentence of banishment and outlawry was passed against Della Bardia, Lucchese, and Infontanetta, as principals in the murders of the younger Margieri and Scanzarella, against which accusation they had neglected to appear to vindicate themselves. Giorgio Erasta, a vassal of the baron Adriano, who had been one of the murderers of don Geronimo Ferrara, and who was taken as he endeavoured to escape from the city, was sentenced to death, and executed on the day following. Yet no symptoms appeared of any commotion, or of any intention of resistance on the part of don Sigismund; it was true that

he had neglected to appear before the tribunal, but had excused himself for so doing ; and although the reasons stated for this neglect were trivial and groundless, yet the offering them shewed a disposition to yield to the power of the law ; and don Paolo, though he did not approve, could no longer oppose the departure of the troops, which was accordingly decided upon without delay.

Federico had, in this interval, obtained another interview with Costanza, in which she had confessed the pleasure she should feel at his return ; and, should it meet the wishes of her family, in complying with his entreaties to unite her fate with his.

The gratitude of Perollo was boundless, and he anticipated, with little doubt, the speedy release of Solanto from the captivity in which he was held, though little information had yet been obtained upon the subject.

The young men were admitted, at their particular request, to take leave of the baroness, who, notwithstanding her own

grief, partook in the sorrow of the family at this separation. She thanked them both for the kind attention they had shewn her since their first meeting, and with melancholy anticipation foretold that they should meet no more. Both endeavoured to cheer her spirits, by the assurance that her anxiety would be removed by the exertions which the baron Mundino was making, and by the confessions which would be extorted from the adherents of Luna ; and that, when once her mind was restored to composure, she would feel her strength return, and that they should soon hope to receive intelligence of her rapid recovery.

The baroness shook her head, and with fervent prayers for their health and happiness, bade them a final adieu.

Don Giacomo was occupied, during the principal part of the evening, with business of importance ; the baroness Pandolfina, though anxious and sad, yet, from the quiet dignity of her usual manner, shewed her feelings but little ; whilst the

countess Sambuca's lamentations were loud and unceasing.

Neither Federico nor Gaetano had been particularly assiduous in cultivating her acquaintance; but she had chosen to conceive a violent friendship for the latter, and to profess a sisterly regard for the former. From the time that the orders for their departure had arrived, she had, at convenient times, when the count was not in the way, chosen to suffer the most violent hysterics at the mention of their parting, and now bewailed, in all the terms of despair she could find, the sad loss she should experience.

The baroness Pandolina paid as little attention as politeness would allow to the tiresome details and incessant questions of the lady, and generally permitted her to engross all the conversation, which made the countess differ from many of her female friends, in thinking the wife of don Giacomo vastly agreeable; and when the lady of Cosmo Luchese, or of Geronimo Perollo, complained that the pride of the

baroness made her reserved and unsocial, and only permitted her to bow her head when they entered the room, and to do the same when they quitted it, the countess vehemently defended the elegant and courtly politeness with which her beloved baroness listened to her conversation—"An example," she generally remarked with a significant look, "which it would be well if the other ladies in Sciacca were to follow."

On the present occasion, the volubility of the countess was not likely to be checked; the baroness was more than commonly silent, Costanza was with her mother, and Marguerita felt all her sorrows return at the idea of losing her two friends.

Federico had, by his kindness and fraternal tenderness, excited in her heart the affection of a sister towards him; but when she thought on the departure of Gaetano, it was with still deeper feelings of regret; these she attributed to the light in which she had always considered him, as the friend of her father, a tie which grief

had consecrated in her eyes ; nor did she examine her sentiments towards Pignatelli. with the scrutiny she might have done, had she suspected that any more tender feeling lurked in the bosom of either. She now sat beside the baroness, weeping in silence at the thoughts of the approaching separation, and unheeding the incessant detail of the miseries which afflicted madame Sambuca.

“ And after you are gone,” said the latter to Gaetano, “ the baron del Mundino will depart, and his officers and lawyers, and we shall return to our usual stupid state, without another murder, or any thing to do till the feast.”

“ ’Tis a pity your excellenza cannot contrive another encounter with the countess Caltabellotta, to pass your time in a more enlivening manner,” replied Gaetano.

“ Pray, signor Pignatelli, don’t mention that dreadful person ; it is getting quite late in the evening, and I never like to think of her when it is dark.”

“ It really would not astonish me,” he

said, "if the present bad aspect of her family affairs were to induce her to enter into a compact with the evil spirit; and possessed of supernatural powers, she would indeed be a dreadful antagonist."

"I only wonder," said the countess, "how I ever survived the fury she was in at the casino, and all for nothing. I only just hinted at the reports about the lady Lucretia, whom she most certainly did murder, and said something to Costanza about Federico, when she had the rudeness to call me horrible names, and to storm and rave as if I had offended her, or caused the restoration of the lady: but do tell me something to put her horrible image out of my thoughts, or I shall not dare to go to bed to-night."

"Will not our final departure do that?" asked the gentleman; "we start at an early hour, and shall not meet to-morrow."

"How inhuman," she replied, in a doleful voice, "to remind me with such indifference of the event which I have been all day deploring!"

"If we were not the two most modest men in the island," replied Federico, "your flattery, my kind cousin, would raise our vanity to an insufferable height."

"Pray, Federico, don't make yourself agreeable now, or it will be still more dreadful to lose you."

"You return to Sambuca," he continued, "as I understand from the count, in a few days—our absence, therefore, will be a less misfortune."

The lady now began to weep.

"The country around your castle is beautiful, I am told, signora."

"Horrible! dreadful!" said the lady. "Hills and valleys, mountains, corn-fields, and vineyards, are all we see; the most tiresome things in life! I, who doat upon a long straight street, a house with plenty of windows, and people always passing before them, to go to a vile dismal castle, with nothing to look at but groves and vineyards, or the castle walls; and to be immured with only my monkey and my husband. Santissima Madre! where is there

so miserable a woman as Theresa di Sambuca?"

"And have you no castles in your neighbourhood, in which there are resident families, that you are driven to so small a domestic circle as one man and a monkey?" asked Gaetano.

"Oh yes," replied the lady, "there are, to be sure, some people at no great distance; but there is something dreadful attached to them all. Our nearest neighbour, the baroness San Filippo, was very agreeable, till she was pointed out by Sambuca as a person who ought to be an example to me; and being told that she was a charming woman, on several disagreeable occasions, I have never been able to bear her since, and am resolved not to enter her castle gates again."

Don Paolo and the baron Pandolfina now entered; the latter had some final communications, which he wished Gaetano to convey to his uncle; and the countess was compelled to give up her auditor, without a hope of finding another.

The party continued during the hour, as if such was necessary to give the signal for separation. At last don Pedro rose and said "Good night" smiling—"we have been indulging our own feelings at the expense of the rest of the young friends will meet you at 11 sharp so early."

Kindly embracing them all he wished them all that was good for them and that they might return to the same assembled friends, when the hour of party had ceased in Seville.

Gasparo took an affectionate leave of all before Marguerita, and when he kissed her cheek, and bade farewell, she burst into tears, and fled from the apartment.

The baron and baroness remained with Federico long after the rest had dispersed, and put violence on their own inclinations in desiring him to lie down for a few hours.

They were with him again, at his short repast, before setting out; and as the baron embraced him at parting, he said—"I

wished you to go, my son; yet I now feel worse than a woman at losing you. Heaven send you safely back again, to gladden your paternal home! Farewell!"

CHAPTER VII.
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Hark ! Ponce !

It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman,  
Which gives the stern'st good night—he is about it.

SHAKESPEARE.

IT had required all the art and plausibility of the baron Adriano, to keep the spirit of don Sigismund from bursting into open violence during the days of Statella's inquiries. To the summons which was delivered to himself, he would have returned an open defiance, but the self-possession of his friend overcame the impetuosity of Luna, and he succeeded in keeping him quiet.

The sentence of outlawry and banishment pronounced against Della Bardia, Luchese, and Infontanetta, had been treated by Adriano with ridicule and contempt.

The execution of Erasta had required more skill to palliate ; the blood of Luna mounted indignantly at the thought of abandoning even one of his inferior followers to a shameful death ; but with cold-hearted policy Adriano argued on the expediency of leaving him to his fate : such an act of forbearance, he pleaded, would do more towards lulling the suspicions of their enemies, than all the protestations their whole party could make, and would do more to facilitate their purposes than the additional power of an hundred men.

Giorgio Erasta was one of his own immediate followers, and it suited the purpose of Adriano at the time to make him out a worthless character ; although his crime had been obedience to his chieftain in an hour of drunken enthusiasm, though during his life he had been extolled as one of his most trustworthy adherents, he now discovered in him every crime which could disgrace human nature, joined with a tendency to treachery and deceit, which would

make his death, even from themselves, an act of justice and prudence.

Sigismund did not attempt to defend a character of which he knew so little ; yet still he argued with obstinacy and pertinacity on the want of spirit it would manifest in himself to submit to such an insult.

Finally, however, Adriano's perseverance succeeded ; don Sigismund gave up the point, and Giorgio Erasta died by the hands of the common executioner—a fate he justly merited, for the slaughter of the gentle and generous Ferrara ; but the ignominy thrown upon his character by Peralta was an injustice his very crime rendered more iniquitous.

The first tidings which were brought to Luna Castle, of the intended return of the troops immediately, were scarcely credited by any of the party ; but when their doubts were changed into certainty, the exultation of Adriano was unbounded, and the most tumultuous satisfaction was expressed by all the adherents of count Luna.

All the leaders who were concealed in Sciacca were summoned to a midnight council in the Castel di Luna, where congratulation and unanimity prevailed. The slight check which had, for a while, impeded their career, seemed to have added tenfold strength to their fury, and the most decisive measures were instantly agreed upon. Every individual was to collect his utmost number of adherents, and Adriano was to repair as secretly as possible to Bivonia, to prepare Della Bardia and his companions to accompany the forces which still remained in readiness to march to Sciacca.

The wounds which Accursi had received were so severe, that it was with some difficulty he was conveyed to Bivonia, and for a day or two after his arrival there, he suffered exceedingly from his journey, and was strictly ordered by his medical attendants to remain perfectly quiet. His desire of getting over to San Bartolomeo was extreme ; but for some time he felt the utter impossibility of doing it ; however he had

determined on making the attempt, though in direct opposition to the opinion of his surgeon, when Adriano arrived with the important intelligence of the project which was on foot, in consequence of the imprudence of Statella and Perollo.

It now required no great powers of persuasion to induce him to remain two or three days longer quiet, that he might not be incapacitated from joining in the ensuing actions ; and, at the end of that time, he was judged sufficiently recovered to proceed to Sciacca.

He set out late in the evening, and made his way into the city through the Casa di Infontanetta. His first object was to seek the countess, to whom he was generally a most unwelcome visitor, but one to whom she dared not at any time refuse admission.

“ I am come, signora,” he said, “ for the purpose of making some final arrangement with you respecting the property of the baroness della Bardia. I wish not to enter into any unpleasant discussion with

don Sigismund ; but, in the uncertain state of our affairs, it is right and proper that some precautions should be taken, to secure her property, beyond the power of any accident which may happen to her brother or myself. In case of the fall of the count, it is requisite to have her claims duly acknowledged ; and the only means of their being clearly determined, is by a declaration of her birth from yourself and count Luna, upon the assembly of our family connexions."

The countess was uncertain what reply to make ; at length she said—" Don Sigismund has consented to receive his sister— why press the matter at a time like this, and before the event which was fixed on as a period to concealment has taken place ?"

" Your excellenza would be happy to defer my rights till this marriage of the count's has been completed : its ever taking place now appears so doubtful, that I am not disposed to wait for it ; events have not succeeded to your expectations,

and I am too much the master of your actions not to make whatever terms I please."

"And do you expect me to live a slave to your insulting tyranny?"

"That is a matter which is at the choice of your excellenza; the influence you possess over count Luna is unbounded, and it is my intention to avail myself of it. You may, as you think proper, obey my commands, or provoke my vengeance by resisting them. Your imperious spirit I have known before crouch beneath the dread of the discoveries I can make; need I recount the particulars of our first private conference, when——"

"No!" exclaimed the lady, with vehemence: "were there no other punishment for my offence than that which I have suffered from your insolence, that deed were deeply avenged."

"Your excellenza," pursued Accursi, "has perhaps forgotten the first effusions of your frenzy at the proofs I held—the ebullitions of passion, which subsided into

tame and meek compliance—the numberless soothing promises with which you masked your intention of ridding yourself of such a torment as D'Amato. The change from imperious anger to sullen fury, and then again to fawning hypocrisy, gave me at the time an insight into the various powers of your capricious soul, which are not easily forgotten.”

“ And to what do these taunting insults tend ?” asked the lady, with smothered indignation.

“ Merely to point out the impotence of your resistance.”

“ And what are your present demands ?”

“ The immediate possession of the property left by Peralta to my wife, the baroness della Bardia, the daughter of Giovanni di Luna, and a full acknowledgment of all her claims on the failure of her brother's issue.”

“ And you mean to bring her over, and present her to her family immediately ?”

“ Probably not,” said Accursi ; “ there

can be no reason for involving her in the present scene of confusion and discord."

"Her presence may probably be necessary in the arrangement of the affairs, which are intricate and complex, and had better be determined after the bustle in which all our friends and family are now engaged is at an end."

"It is my will to have the matter publicly and openly arranged without further delay."

"Then," replied the countess, "Francisca must herself appear."

"Impossible!" said Della Bardia, without consideration: "it would be useless," he added, "and is not part of my present arrangements."

The countess had urged the production of her daughter only as a pretext to gain time; but there was something in the manner of Della Bardia which excited a suspicion in her mind, that he had some secret motive for the refusal; it was not probable that any regard to her feelings or

comfort induced him to prevent her coming to Sciacca, yet that he had some motive was evident.—“Sigismund has expressed a wish to see his sister,” she said, “and where can she be so well, or so properly placed, as with her mother? or what means can be so eligible of announcing her existence, and confirming her identity to the world, as by a personal introduction to her family?”

“My own health and engagements will not at present allow of this,” said Accursi; “but this debate is foreign to the subject. I am now come to procure the immediate payment of the portion due to my bride, as the co-heiress of Peralta; and an open declaration of her future claims, in the general assembly of the house of Luna.”

“And in what way is my influence to be exerted?” asked the countess.

“By stating my wishes to count Luna, and using your power over him, to procure the attainment of them. As one of the trustees also for the Peralta property, you may, by your evidence and authority,

command the payment of the sum demanded."

"And when am I to be freed from this state of thralldom, and the pledges which you now hold restored?"

"I have found them so useful, that I must beg for your permission to retain them still," said Accursi, with a smile.

Her unwillingness to deprive her son of the portion of wealth, to purchase which she had sacrificed so much, induced the countess to venture to the last extremity she dared proceed with Della Bardia. His present reluctance to produce the person of Francisca, gave birth to a hope that there was some motive which induced him to hurry on the affair, and of which she might avail herself. The next morning she sent to request don Sigismund's attendance in her private apartments.

"I sent for you," she said, on his entrance, "in consequence of an interview I had last night with Della Bardia relating to Francisca; he desires to have her portion of Peralta's wealth delivered into his

hands, and her connexion with us immediately proclaimed to our friends on their assembling in Sciacca."

"When I had learned from you, my mother," said Luna, "the truth of my relationship to this unknown sister, I was fully aware of the claim which she possessed, and which Heaven forbid I should even wish to deprive her of. The demands of Della Bardia could not have come at a more inconvenient time; yet, as far as they can, they shall be complied with. But why should he insist on this public recognition now under such circumstances?"

"His conduct," replied the countess, "is, as usual, mysterious; and it behoves us to act with caution. The introduction of Francisca herself should, I think, precede any other arrangements; this would prevent the necessity of much unpleasant detail, and enable the guardians, under the will of Peralta, to act with more satisfaction to themselves."

"The whole affair," answered Luna, "is

inexplicable; but I think with you that the presence of Francisca is necessary to the re-establishment of her rights."

"It is only necessary," answered the countess, "that you make this the preliminary step to the adjustment of the affair; but let it not appear to be at my instigation. I am in some degree pledged to support the wishes of Della Bardia, though contrary to my real sentiments upon the subject; yet, as the happiness of Francisca is perhaps at stake, I am willing to sacrifice much, that by compliance with him I may acquire an influence capable of promoting her future welfare."

The intention of the countess, in thus urging the production of her daughter, was not perhaps from an idea of deriving any ultimate benefit from such a measure; but the conduct of Della Bardia proved his unwillingness to do it, and for that unwillingness she supposed some motive might exist, which would at least give her time for deliberation; and, notwithstanding every probability was in favour of her

being compelled to surrender the wealth, and make every concession her tyrant chose to insist on, yet every delay was a respite to her, and the pleasure of opposing him, great as was the hazard, she could not resist.

Intelligence soon arrived of the exertions of the friends of Luna; they had collected more than three hundred horse and four hundred foot soldiers, exclusive of fifty brave Agrigentines, and fifty lancers from Salermi, brought by don Michele Pugiades and his two brothers. This force, consisting of more than eight hundred men, awaited the orders of their chieftain, who instantly set out for Bivonia to join them.

Before his departure, he had a short interview with Accursi, and informed him of the information which had arrived, and the conversation he had held with his mother; declaring, at the same time, his readiness to refund the inheritance of his sister, and publicly to recognise her, but expressed his intention of being first intro-

duced to her, and his desire that she should be brought to Sciacca as soon as possible.

Della Bardia knew well the dispositions of count Luna, and from whence he derived his opinions, in his intention to be introduced to his sister, before any steps were taken in the adjustment of her affairs ; he clearly saw the influence of the countess, and was aware of the momentary forgetfulness into which he had been betrayed during his interview with her on the preceding night, and the impolitic anxiety he had shewn to resist the production of Francisca's person, which he feared to do, until by his presence he had habituated her to consider herself as his wife. He dreaded lest she should declare the violence which had been offered, and the illegality of her marriage; that don Sigmund, should espouse her cause; and that all his power over the countess would be exerted in vain to bend the spirit of her daughter, or to overcome the repugnance of her son to force the inclinations

of Francisca, and to overlook the means he had used to possess himself of her person; and he was consequently enraged beyond measure at the manoeuvre of the lady, who, not daring openly to resist his will, had thus endeavoured secretly to counteract his intentions, and instigated Sigismund to require the presence of his sister in Sciacca.

The countess Caltabellotta was absent during great part of the day from the Castel di Luna, engaged, it was said, in devotion at the convent of Lucia; Della Bardia had therefore no opportunity, for some hours, of venting his displeasure against her.

Information respecting the steps which the Luna party had taken on the departure of the troops, was soon given to the baron Pandolfina; and he learned also the increasing number of their partisans. To remedy the evil his want of caution had brought on, was now the only thing to be done, and he repaired to Statella, to confer with him upon the subject; and don Pa-

olo attended him, who, without boasting of his own wisdom in foretelling what had taken place, endeavoured to devise some possible means of preventing the increase of the danger, and to avoid its coming to the termination which he dreaded.

They found Statella surrounded by lawyers and counsellors, busily employed in taking informations and examining witnesses as to the late disturbances.

Don Giacomo requested a private audience, which was instantly granted, and the commander withdrew with the two cavaliers.

"My cousin, don Paolo," said Pandolfina, "was right in the advice he gave; and we have been too precipitate in the dismissal of the forces your excellenza brought with you."

"How so, signor?" asked Statella.

"The Luna party are making head at Bivonia, and have collected upwards of eight hundred men, under their determined and sanguinary chiefs."

"Let the city gates be closed against

them," said Statella; "we will yet find means to make examples of these rebels, and to shew them the power which law and justice can exert, when called on to suppress such insolent presumption."

"So many are their friends in Sciacca, and so various the private means they possess of entering the city, that it would be useless to close the gates; and besides, an open attack is not what we immediately fear; and all may yet be well," said don Giacomo, "if your excellenza would retire within the Casa di Perollo; our united strength might then defy open assaults and private machinations."

"Grateful as I feel for your attention, baron Pandolfina," said Statella, "I am sorry to decline it, but consider myself obliged to do so—we have yet much information to obtain, and many circumstances to investigate, and it would savour too much of partiality, were our proceedings carried on beneath your roof, and apparently under your influence and direction."

“The conduct of don Sigismond,” said Paolo Perollo, “will justify your acceptance of Pandolfina’s offer, signor. I would not urge you to an act which might look like partiality, did not the present aspect of affairs threaten the worst and most fatal consequences. You may even suspend your measures for a time, until we see what steps our opponents are prepared to take.”

“Representing the person of his Imperial majesty,” replied Statella, “it is not probable that the infatuation of the insurgents would venture to offer any violence to me; and by holding myself independent of your kindness, don Giacomo, I may prevent any farther outrages from being committed against your friends and family.”

“I wish not,” said don Paolo, “to excite any prejudice in the mind of your excellenza against the house of Luna; but from our knowledge of the dispositions of its various members, and from what we are able to learn of their present intentions,

it is clear that no trust is to be given to any show of moderation they may make. The disaffection of several of the chiefs to the present government, and the inveterate hatred they all bear towards our house, are become excitements too powerful to be conquered, even by the fear of utter destruction to all their party."

"The atrocious murder of Geronimo Ferrara shews," said Pandolfina, "how little regard they manifest to the mutual friends of Luna and myself; and did they not propose some undertaking of importance, would they have gathered together so great a number of men? Again let me urge you to take up your immediate residence with me."

"No," replied Statella, obstinately persevering in his original opinion; "it is impossible for men to be so void of reason, so transported by passion, as to venture such an insult against the majesty of the empire, or to attack the representative of sovereign power, with the certainty of bringing ruin on themselves. They might

expect, in the hurry of preparing for a foreign expedition, that the viceroy would overlook a trifling broil, or even an individual murder ; but so daring an act as an assault upon a public minister of justice, sent with full powers from government, they could not hope would be passed over without the severest punishment."

"To any other set of men," replied don Paolo, "the arguments of your excellenza might perhaps apply ; but the house of Luna have for years been approaching to this crisis, and given all their thoughts to the destruction of our race ; the hour of contest is arrived, and the best method of counteracting their designs appears to be that which don Giacomo proposes. If your excellenza would retire within the walls of his castle, the authority you can there command may be exerted to call forth the loyalty of the people, who may otherwise not choose to take a part with either of our factions ; but in dividing our force, we must all eventually fall, before we can either obtain the aid of our distant

friends, or the still more remote assistance of the viceroy."

The purpose of Statella remained, however, fixed; no arrangement could induce him to change his resolution, and his friends gave up the point, after a long and strenuous endeavour to persuade him to listen to prudence and reason. As don Giacomo considered himself in some degree the cause of the dismissal of the troops, he felt responsible for Statella's future safety, and requested permission to send Margieri with a small band of men to protect him from the first effects of the storm, as they might perhaps secure a retreat to the Castel di Perollo, should such a measure be necessary.

This offer Statella did not refuse, though convinced there was but little chance of needing them.

An air of unusual gloom hung over the hospitable mansion of Perollo. Don Giacomo was anxious and uneasy, and continually reproached himself for the precipitancy with which he had dismissed the

aid the viceroy sent. Don Paolo, who had at the time resisted their departure to the utmost, now found every excuse for the conduct of his kinsman; his activity and exertions gave fresh spirits to the whole party, and his cheerfulness, in some degree, succeeded in removing the depression of Pandolfina. Hitherto he had been the unceasing advocate for peace, had softened every irritating event which had occurred between the rival houses; and, until the late outrages, been a never-failing advocate for count Luna. A different spirit now seemed to have taken possession of his bosom; and he appeared to regard the approaching contest rather with satisfaction than alarm. At all times a favourite with every member of his family, he now appeared their guardian-angel; his presence carried with it security and encouragement; the men regarded him with affectionate devotion, and the officers with confidence and respect.

The baroness had been apprised of the danger of a tumult, and the probability of

an attack upon the castle ; she had received the information with calm and unaltered serenity, and obeyed the directions of don Giacomo in removing, with her children and the other ladies, into the tower which stood within the interior court, without any evident symptoms of alarm.

The baroness Solanto was removed to a chamber as remote as possible from any part of the castle liable to attack, and every precaution taken to save her from unnecessary agitation and distress.

The countess Sambuca had, upon the first tidings of danger, been seized with a fit of enthusiastic devotion ; she had vowed pilgrimage to every shrine from St. Jago in Spain to the holy sepulchre itself ; had procured from the confessor of the castle absolution for all her sins ; and seemed expecting, though not with much impatience, a crown of martyrdom. She had borrowed an immense folio history of Santa Radagunda, and, with a large rosary on her arm, was seated in one corner of the

"I have made my peace with Heaven and I have been at Santa Radegunda. My trunks and wardrobe are at Sanabria, and from these trunks I hope you have seen your parents. Sometimes Mother said I was at Palermo—any where but in this horrible place."

She then resorted to her book again, and, without comprehending a word, muttered over, in a half-audible tone of whining devotion, two or three pages respecting the foundation of a monastery by the saint whose legend was before her.

“A curious employment, signora,” said madame Luchese, “at a time like this, to be reading the dimensions of refectories, dormitories, and cloisters.”

"Don't disturb me," said the countess; "it is a good book. I am sure I asked father Giuseppe to lend me a good book, and he brought me the history of this saint, who was martyred by the Saracens, as we shall be."

She then resumed her employment, till another opportunity offered of disturbing her friends by her individual sorrows and lamentations; and at every pause, when her terrors returned, she resorted to the volume before her, and read with rapidity, as if she imagined that the quantity of the said good book would be an antidote against the approaching evils.

At the Castel di Luna, the day passed in busy expectation. The count returned in the evening with a numerous attendance, and appeared in the highest spirits, as if the hour of his triumph was already come.

"You have considered my request, I hope, don Sigismund," said Della Bardia, who met him soon after his arrival. "and are prepared to fulfil my wishes?"

"At present," said count Luna, "I did.

not think that any of our party would have pressed his private interests on my thoughts, when every moment should be given to our public measures; much less did I suppose that such would have been the conduct of Della Bardia."

"I have too much at stake, signor, at this eventful time, to forget that which is due to others as well as myself."

"If possible," said Sigismund, "I will meet you in my mother's apartment, when all our arrangements are completed."

His forces arrived about two hours after sunset, near the walls of Sciacca, where they halted, and dismissed a messenger to the count with the tidings; upon which he proceeded, with a considerable number, as secretly as possible, to the Porta di Palermo, which they succeeded in securing; and after seizing the persons appointed to keep it, admitted as many of their party as they thought proper.

It had been determined to divide their forces into two squadrons, one of which was

placed under the command of don Michele Pugiades; and the other, in which were all the noblemen and cavaliers, was headed by count Luna in person. Pugiades and his band remained without the city walls, being stationed in the valley Dell' Abadía, under the Casa di Perollo, to prevent all egress from the gate which opened from thence into the country.

No sooner had the count admitted his friends than they began, without loss of time, to barricado the streets, so as to prevent all intercourse between don Giacomo and Statella, that neither might afford succour to the other. They possessed themselves also of the Porta di Santa Caterina, and the house of don Geronimo Perollo, which faced the greater gate of Pandolfina's castle, in which they found no resistance; don Geronimo having, with all the other friends of his family, removed within his kinsman's walls. Here they planted themselves, intending to make it their principal point of attack; and, for their better defence, threw up a breastwork, composed

of sacks filled with earth, to afford some shelter against the artillery which don Giacomo had planted on his battlements.

Francisco Perollo, the principal magistrate of the city, who lived near Santa Marguerita, at the other part of the town, informed of these proceedings, could no longer doubt the danger to which he had exposed himself, by neglecting the warning of Pandolfina. To attempt now to reach the castle, or to afford any assistance to don Giacomo, he considered hopeless; and mounting his horse, fled from the city with all the speed in his power, taking the road to Partanna, to raise the vassals of Perollo in aid of their chief.

Having seen his men to their allotted posts, placed vigilant officers over them, and enjoined the strictest silence till the signal should be given, don Sigismund returned for an hour or two to his castle. The chiefs whose services were required, were all upon their stations, and every thing awaited the morning light.

Count Sigismund sought the apartment

of his mother, and was speedily followed thither by Della Bardia, who had resolved not to resign his demands, even at the last minute; the countess changed colour as he entered the room, and expressed her surprise at seeing him.

"It was by my appointment," said the count. "The barone pressed me on my return this evening on the same subject—the acknowledgment of Francisca, and the resignation of her property. I could not attend to him at the time, nor can I now do more than repeat my former promises upon the matter—that as soon as we have fulfilled our meditated revenge against Pandolfina, Francisca shall be publicly presented to her family, and her claims of relationship confirmed by you, my mother, and by myself; without her personal introduction, I see not how the affair can be arranged."

"And is this the opinion of your excellenza?" asked Accursi, turning to the countess with a look she perfectly understood.

"My wish," she replied, "is to contribute to the happiness of both my children. I am willing to resign Francisca's dower, but the consent of the other guardians of the Peralta property must also be obtained."

"I have been trifled with," said Della Bardia, again looking at the countess, who trembled violently.

Don Sigismund, astonished at her agitation, inquired the cause; uncertain of the length to which the malice of Della Bardia might provoke him, she feared the hour was come in which he would reveal to her son the secrets he possessed. How to appease and conciliate him she knew not; and conscious of having betrayed his cause, she was aware of the plea he might advance for no longer keeping terms with her.—"I am most willing," she said at length, "to make any concession you demand, signor."

"And instantly?" asked Accursi.

"Yes," she faltered out, evidently under the impression of extreme terror.

The astonishment of count Lúcia increased.—“ There appears to be some undue influence exerted over your mind, my mother,” he said. “ The conduct of the barone requires explanation ; it has been throughout a tissue of mystery, which time will not allow me now to investigate ; but, until I am satisfied with respect to his motives, I forbid you to proceed in the business a step beyond where it has now gone. I deprecate all concessions and engagements entered into in your present state of mind, and insist upon all discussion being deferred till we are more at leisure to attend. For you, Della Bardia,” he continued, “ you have availed yourself of circumstances to form an alliance with our house, unauthorized by those to whom it was your first duty to apply. I do not wish or intend to publish the dissatisfaction such an act must necessarily have caused ; but excuse me if, in the present instance, I think that more attention is due from you towards the feelings of those

whom you have offended by such a precipitate and unwarrantable measure."

The barone had not expected to rouse these sentiments of opposition in don Sigismund, nor did he wish to provoke him. —"The countess," he replied, "can best explain the motives from which she acts; for myself, I confess that my anxiety to establish the rights of the baroness my wife, in case the present contest should terminate unfortunately to myself or your excellenza, has induced me to press the conclusion of the affair. But I will now leave it entirely to the discretion of the countess, who knows my wishes upon the subject, and with whose character I am so well acquainted."

With this compliance don Sigismund appeared somewhat appeased; the fears of the countess were relieved, and she protested her wish to make an immediate transfer of the property, and to put the parties in possession of all their legal rights.

A summons from Adriano called the count from his mother's chamber, and he desired Della Bardia to follow him. The night was wearing fast away, and the party in anxious expectation of the dawn which was to light them to vengeance and slaughter.

END OF VOL. III.









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